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TERMUSH

SVEN  
HOLM

'A classic.'  
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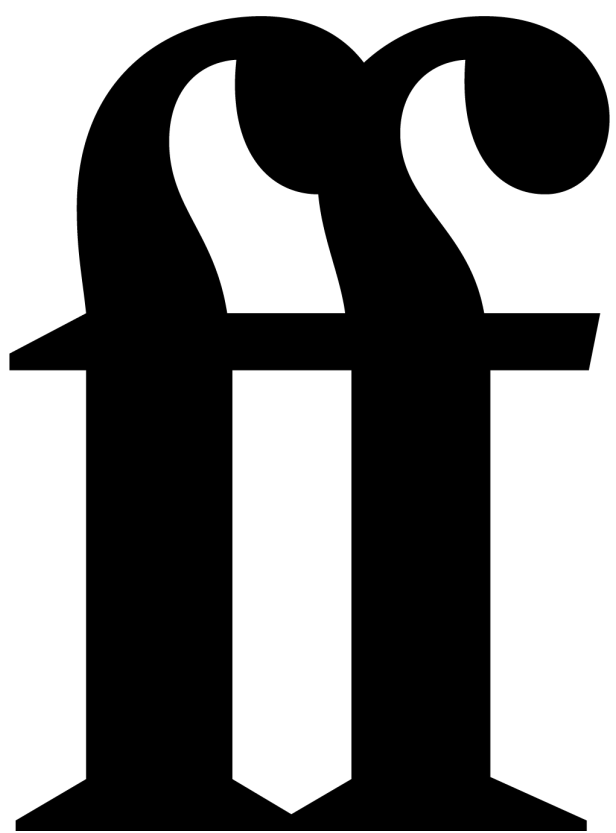
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# TERMUSH



Sven Holm

Translated from the Danish

by Sylvia Clayton

faber

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## FOREWORD

by Jeff VanderMeer

*Outside, the sea is still; there is no darkness and no light.*

Halfway through Sven Holm's taut unfolding nightmare, *Termush*, the unnamed narrator encounters 'ploughed-up and trampled gardens', where 'stone creatures are the sole survivors'. Holm describes these statues as 'curious forms, the bodies like great ill-defined blocks, designed more to evoke a sense of weight and mass than to suggest power in the muscles and sinews.' Later, a guest of this gated, walled hotel for the rich relates a dream in which 'light streamed out of every object; it shone through robes and skin and the flesh on the bones, the leaves on the trees ... to reveal the innermost vulnerable marrow of people and plants.'

The same could describe an enduring quality of *Termush* itself, which accrues its strange effects via both this stricken, continuous revealing and the 'curious forms' of a solid, impervious setting, in which the ordinary elements of our world come to seem alien through the lens of nuclear catastrophe.

Long before the sanctuary of *Termush* becomes visibly unsafe, these tears at the fringes of reality signify the truth of the narrator's situation. The very texture of the world becomes unknowable or, alternatively, imbued with a potency, vibration or sheen that alters reality. Holm's *Termush*, then, is both a realistic chronicle of a micro-society's collapse and a surreal journey of a man confronted by crisis, remaking his surroundings as a way of coping.

Another overlap exists here, too, one not as pronounced as in the 1960s, when Holm published *Termush*. The detritus and

decisions of the past may still affect our future, in that the threat of nuclear holocaust has not left us. But in the interim, other disasters that manifest in largely 'invisible' ways have overtaken us – our fear of radiation and immolation has led to climate crisis fear, which has led to pandemic fear. The grappling of minds with these threats leads to derangement and odd visions because the elements of infiltration and contamination baffle the brain. Our hauntings in the modern era so often now are not ghosts but simply the things we cannot see – but that radically affect us.

Little wonder then that, read now, the lucid logic of *Termush* feels more like lucid dreaming, imbued with a new relevance in which unseen monsters creep through the same rooms as the narrator, studying his movements. The stark deficiencies of emergency management become hyper-real or ultra-real because of the overlay of self-inflictions in our modern times. For *Termush* – unlike some vintage classics, cult or otherwise – has waxed not waned in relevance. The accuracy in the calm description of becoming undone by disaster, and the anonymity of place and character, ensures a sense of timelessness.

It's a curious book in this regard, with its dispassionate prose that eschews, in large part, the sensory detail of taste, touch and smell, yet gets to the heart of living through such a situation. At that heart is the disconnection that occurs, laid bare by a certain level of detail, or lack of detail. Amid the banal recitation of procedure and the understated but sharp satire about privileged people, such a strong sense of feeling about the world rises from these pages.

Holm cleverly has his narrator both draw attention away from and underscore this impulse from the opening pages, in which he expresses confusion about how 'painlessly' catastrophe has come to pass, having 'unconsciously thought in terms of something more drastic, a radical transformation, with every single object showing traces of what had occurred, the furniture and the walls changing character and the view outside our window revealing a totally different world'. In this way, the physical manifestations of



human imagination become characters in the novella, even when unchanged, because they are expected to change.

One of the best passages in *Termush* builds on this impulse in an extended disaster reverie, which expresses confusion, relief and a restructuring of the narrator's surroundings to match the invisible truth: 'that stone would no longer be stone and air no longer air, so that to find a person turned into a pillar of salt would no longer be a myth but a reality.'

This transmutation reflects a yearning for comfort, for anchors, for meaning, that the radiation either eludes, or of which it was always preternaturally free. 'How much better,' the subtext screams, 'if it all were made manifest so I could understand it better, grapple with it, wrestle it to the ground.' But no, it is not even mist: mist to wander through lost, perhaps charting a course offshore in the hotel yacht, which at one point is guest engorged and sent out to sea to distract from the calamity.

*Are you in favour of the management's boat trip? I am in favour of the management's boat trip.* Thus goes a trippy chapter with an existential undertow (Holm can also be funny in his deadpan recital of the procedures of emergency).

\*

A highly honoured literary realist in Denmark, Holm may not have expected or even intended to create a speculative novella that reads so well to a modern audience. His other works contain no such element, but many do feature similar grand gestures, and *all* critique modern society, seeking ways to, for lack of a better term, wake the reader up to the evils of capitalism and other consumptive ideologies.

In its treatment of the aftermath of nuclear war, *Termush* distinguishes itself from the so-called 'disaster cosies' of the 1950s, like the novels of John Wyndham, to occupy more urgent territory. In this genre, the dangers of some calamitous situation become entwined with an almost cheery disaster tourism tone, but more importantly, civilization always wins in the end, even if in an

altered form. The militias may hold sway for a while, or the plague lay waste to whole towns, but by the novel's close, equilibrium and balance, logic and order, always return to human endeavors.

Not so much in *Termush*, which also eludes, through its particular focus and narrative velocity, echoes of Cold War conflict which might otherwise have dated the novella. Instead of a pervading sense of 'the other' about to storm the gates, Holm delves into the psychology of the holed-up survivors and the hazards of societal breakdown.

In this sense, and with its surreal touches, *Termush* feels more like a bridge novella between the return-to-normalcy of the cosy and the extravagant, mind-bending dystopias of J. G. Ballard, which ushered in the modern era of this kind of fiction. The right excerpt from *Termush* could easily have appeared in *New Worlds*, the seminal 1960s magazine for the New Wave of which Ballard was a part. This speculative movement ably applied a rigorous intellectual attitude and sometimes formally experimental approaches to hybrid fiction; novels that had a gritty, realistic feel while at the same time trading in unsettling images and devastating portrayals of the psychological effects of the wrong future on human minds.

Holm definitely meant to access the psychological reality of his situation, and the novella contains much subtle character insight, despite his characters often existing at the same sparse level of detail as their surroundings. The hotel doctor, for example, asks a woman for a urine sample to check the guests' health, but she collapses 'across the table ... in a fit of hysteria', while 'she repeated that nothing was wrong with her urine'. In a lesser novel, this would function for the modern reader as a gendered signpost of the times. But Holm proves more insightful, with his narrator's observation that 'the woman's reaction is understandable'. What is less understandable is the way the rest of us keep such an inflexibly stiff upper lip without relaxing in argument or giving way to laughter or irritation. Her outburst seems to me more natural, because it means 'that neither her imagination nor her sensibility is gagged and bound, as ours are.' Holm shows that in trying to

cope by stifling such impulses, the very landscape becomes distorted and unfamiliar, while the invisible malady continues to infiltrate and surround the hotel.

Few dystopian novels focused on a privileged group's reaction to disaster lack some societal critique, and if *Termush's* commentary seems basic, well, perhaps the modern monoculture needs to become more complex. As ever – from before *Termush*, during *Termush* and after *Termush* – rich people tend to be more able to escape the effects of an event, for the obvious reasons.

Yet Holm's portrayal of dealing with radiation refugees storming the hotel has a logic and humanity that is deeply thought-provoking, as the hotel management tries to act ethically, with some guests agreeing to support them and some not. His deft touch inhabits sentences like: 'the groaning of the sick people in the library has died down, as if they too were issued with brandy or had been asked not to disturb the festivities on the hotel's anniversary.'

Late in the novella, too, as conditions worsen but also deepen, the narrator's imagination widens to contemplate the entirety of what cannot be seen and what has not yet been fully felt within their privileged sanctuary: 'we see the day when the fish leave the water and push through the sand and earth to the trees, where they bite into the bark with their skinless jaws and drag themselves up into the branches to live according to new instincts. We see the trees bare of leaves, festooned with fishy skeletons, their skins rustling like a death-rattle.'

From this phantasmagorical beginning, the narrator's vision spreads outward to encompass the Earth and the humans within it. While *Termush* admirably conveys the reality of living through nuclear apocalypse, Holm's greatest triumph lies in conveying the psychological strangeness and derangement of such a situation. If the novella can be termed a kind of classic, it is for these unexpected and unique elements, which are, in a sense, more real than reality.

'Our fear is no longer a fear of death but of change and mutation', Holm writes.

Onward, to Termush! Perhaps, one way or another, we can make it there in time.



TERMUSH

# 1

I have been installed in one of the rooms on the top floor here in the hotel. Everything went according to plan, just as it had been run through for us beforehand, on the lines explained in the brochures we received with our enrolment forms.

None of us had expected that it would happen so painlessly. I mean that both literally and metaphorically. We had unconsciously thought in terms of something more drastic, a radical transformation, with every single object showing traces of what had occurred, the furniture and the walls changing character and the view outside our window revealing a totally different world.

Nevertheless we feel the changes somewhere in ourselves. The state of panic and anticipation is over and has been replaced by complete deafness, not just of the ears but of the whole body, a sense of exhaustion or deep-seated dizziness. We cannot get up from a chair to go to the door without being aware of this, yet no one among us can control it. Everything has changed, yet we search for one single detail which has in fact been altered. It is like a wavering convalescence between sickness and death.

The management has impressed on us that we ought not to feel secure. Even though we have stayed a sufficient length of time in the shelters under the hotel, even though all the offices, passages, bedrooms and reception rooms have been washed down and checked by the security men, including the hotel's immediate surroundings, all the guests have been issued with a dosimeter and are obliged to enter up the amount of radiation they have received each day. Radiation meters have been put up all over the hotel, on the sunshine roof and on every floor. They are read at regular intervals.

There is of course no danger of the guests feeling secure. When the management uses this expression, it is not because they are incapable of putting themselves in the guests' position, but because they choose simple, straightforward language, partly to reassure themselves and partly to remind us of the impersonal tone of the brochure. When all is said and done, management and guests are faced with precisely the same situation.

The furniture in my room was stored for safety in the cellar, even the mirror, the bookshelves and the prints on the wall. Everything was brought up and the room was arranged before I moved in.

A bed, a table, two chairs, a lamp, a wardrobe. A garden by Monet with poppies, redder than red, and a brilliant but soft light, an attempt to catch the light of a childhood memory. A head by Klee, blank as a mask, but cunning, gleaming like a huge melon, at once friendly and frightening. The management has said that people can have their pictures changed if they find them unsuitable, or trade them with their neighbours if they just want a temporary rearrangement. Between the two pictures hangs the mirror, where you can check your own face, without, however, having the opportunity of getting that changed.

I have been thinking over one of the points mentioned in the brochure: "A physical aspect of radioactive destruction is the transformation of elements. For instance, take radioactive phosphorus, P-32. This isotope is converted by the transmission of a Beta particle into stable sulphur. It is not difficult to imagine the confusion that will arise ..."

Was it this warning that convinced us that the things most familiar to us would, after the disaster, be the most alien? That phosphorus would tumble down the table of elements and turn into sulphur, that something with the appearance of a recognized metal would prove to be something quite different with altogether different properties, that stone would no longer be stone and air no longer air, so that to find a person turned into a pillar of salt would be no longer a myth but a reality.

Did we believe that we would find a wooden table transformed into spongy pulp, the surface of a mirror into impalpable phosphorescent light? Did we imagine that the door-handle would crumble beneath our touch, or the glass window-panes collapse into a heap of burning silica, that cloth would become as rigid as steel plates and a bunch of fruit would splinter in our hands like china? Did we expect that the molecules of the air would be as sharp as crystals and that our own skin would turn into something dark and glazed, nothing to do with ourselves at all?

We did not envisage quite such a ruthless change in our environment. But one of the reasons for our feelings of weakness may be that things have retained their outward appearance, now that the disaster has happened. Without knowing it, we put our faith in the disaster; we thought that our panic would be justified if we had to use symbols as violent as those our imagination needed earlier.

But we came back from our stay in the shelters to find a world changed less than a summer thunderstorm would have changed it. And now when we have a profound need for imagination and insight, none of us seems to have the power to satisfy it.

Within twenty-four hours of our return to the hotel everyone has been busy—or has made himself busy—with the arrangement of the furniture, comparing pictures and the position of the various rooms.

Outside the sun has been shining through a thin layer of cloud, but there has been no sign of rain, which, according to the radiation experts, ought to reassure us.



## 2

We were called down to the lounge early in the morning. The message came over the hotel's loudspeaker system, which evidently works so that it can broadcast this type of command even when the individual loudspeakers are switched off. When I use the word "command" I am not trying to suggest any feeling of opposition on my part, but I do find that this arrangement discriminates against the individual guest. And yet I have my doubts about this; the system may be essential for us all, it is merely the use of it in this instance that I object to.

The management informed us that in a few days they would be sending out a group of reconnaissance men, who would investigate the possibilities of making contact with other groups in those districts neither totally destroyed nor still danger areas because of the risk of radiation.

The reconnaissance men would take with them long-range microphone equipment and every morning the management would inform us what calculations and observations they had made the previous day.

The patrol would of course be equipped with the necessary protective clothing, but the attempt to make it motorized had been abandoned. According to the last radio reports we received in the shelters the entire highway network has been destroyed. There was talk of using small scooters, but these are really better suited to shorter distances and the problem of fuel would be difficult to solve.

The group turns out to consist of a radiation expert, a doctor and a few volunteers, who, so far as I know, offered their services while we were still underground in the shelters. Quite naturally younger men have been preferred for this assignment.

Since what the group will find in the way of undamaged foodstuffs cannot be predicted, they are taking tinned goods with them, but because of the weight they cannot be given drink to last for more than a few days. The management and the scouts themselves pin their faith to the underground fresh-water supplies marked on the map. In my view there is good reason to believe that these water installations have been destroyed—or if they are intact, they will already have been used. The map showing the underground water storage facilities was sent out officially several years ago.

It seemed to me on the whole that the group of scouts was rather optimistic in its judgement. Of course the individual members have been specially selected and the nature of their assignment may give a boost to their ability, or perhaps their discretion, but on the other hand, they represent nobody but themselves, and if they were to do something foolish the effect on the hotel's guests and management would be incalculable. According to the full plan, as presented in the brochure, it was intended to send out an individual group of reconnaissance men only if all forms of public communication had failed. But I thought it was best not to express my private doubts at the first meeting.

One of the guests suggested that the reconnaissance men's reports should be transmitted direct via the hotel's loudspeaker system, and even though the suggestion was meant seriously, it aroused considerable merriment and shaking of heads. Of course the idea was in itself melodramatic, but it is important that guests should suggest alternatives that can be discussed.

The hotel doctor told us that he wanted samples of urine from each of us several times a week in order to compare the results with the recordings on the dosimeter. One of the women suddenly collapsed across the table in front of her in a fit of hysteria. She stared at the doctor when he wanted to help her and continued to shake her head while she repeated that there was nothing wrong with her urine, that she would not allow her urine to be examined and that there had been nothing in the brochure about this type of examination.

She was quietly taken away and the doctor gave her a sedative injection. I sought her out later on, when I discovered that she lived in the room opposite mine. She lay there half asleep and wanted to hold my hand in her two hands, which were moist and warm, but her thoughts were tranquillized and she no longer saw anything nerve-shattering in the doctor's announcement; she had apparently almost forgotten what had happened in the lounge.

The woman's reaction is understandable. What is less understandable is the way the rest of us keep such an inflexibly stiff upper lip without relaxing in argument or giving way to laughter and irritation. Her outburst seems to me more natural than our self-control. It means that neither her imagination nor her sensibility is gagged and bound, as ours are.

And I should like to question further whether we ourselves are in a fit condition to examine all the pros and cons about sending out the reconnaissance men or to make decisions about our future existence? Whether we are not in danger of atrophy, because we are inhibited from reacting outside the lines of the brochure? Whether we shall be able to master our own personalities, if we have suppressed those impulses that make us imaginative and active, irritable and insecure, but better able, when necessary, to make value judgements?

I include myself in these observations, because I go about preoccupied with the coppery-green colour of the carpet, which annoys me, and the noise from the room next door which impinges on me against my will. The armchair is the only item of furniture in the room which gives me satisfaction. Even the mirror has a frame which makes it clash with the rest of the furnishings.

All these details obsess me to a degree that makes me surprised and uneasy. My only consolation is that everything is still so new that what happened can neither be comprehended by reason nor has it yet been able to penetrate the subconscious.

### 3

For the first time today we were able to go outside the hotel. When we came back from the shelters I met some of the security men, who, equipped with Geiger counters, gas-masks and coarse, shiny protective clothing have been allowed into the grounds and the area around the buildings which has been sluiced down.

The flagstones leading down to the grounds and out to sea have all been turned over, the great cactus plants washed and the soil between them dug up, the flowers have been cut down and ploughed into their own flower-beds, the bushes hosed with water and turned upside down on to the lawns, every single blade of grass has been turned inside out like the fingers of a glove, if the security men's descriptions are to be believed.

Therefore the landscape is brown, the soil is breaking up everywhere, but the great plate-like cactus leaves gleam green, and the foliage of the bushes shines as if it were artificial. The furrowed cliffs that tower above the land down by the sea have been scrubbed clean of vegetation and spattered with earth and water.

A short distance away from the hotel's private grounds the landscape appears to be quite unspoiled. The colours alternate between green and grey, but the security men have taken readings there and they maintain that to stay there would be like living in an atmosphere of sulphuric acid. It is only because there is a lull in the wind and no danger of dust from the surrounding country blowing in over the hotel that it is possible for us to be taken outside even now.

We moved round the grounds as if we wanted to test whether the paths would bear our weight, inspecting the cactus plants and the heaps of stones. No one ventured too far away from the rest



of the group but followed the route as marked to the observation point looking down over the beach, and then back to the front steps of the hotel.

No one spoke much; everyone wore an overcoat and quite a few had handkerchiefs round their mouths, even though the security men had said that this was not necessary. A chill feeling of anxiety hung over us all, forcing us to keep together close behind the man who carried the radiation meter.

I followed with the woman I spoke of yesterday. She joined me, saying nothing but giving me a brief smile, and when we came near the observation point I offered her my arm. She seems to me to be still restless, not only because of what happened yesterday but because a slight anxiety and insecurity are fundamental to her nature. Thus she is able to face the world outside without the sleepwalker's confidence that characterizes the rest of us, which, although it enables us to take action, at the same time prevents us from questioning our behaviour and its motives.

We did not exchange many words, but we were aware in the same moment of a shared emotion when the sea suddenly appeared, stretched out before us on our right. Not because the sea was changed, but perhaps because in that moment the change in ourselves stood clearly revealed. A limitless, cooled-down desert filled with colourless gleams of sun. Only close inland by the cliffs could you follow the movement of the water—as if the speed and formation of the waves had been slowed down because of the height of the observation point above the beach.

The sight of the Atlantic Ocean, which chilled me so profoundly, gave me my first realization of what had happened. Yet this had nothing to do with the disaster; on the contrary, this was the last place one would expect to find traces of it. The ploughed-up grounds, the washed-down cactus plants, the churned-up flower-beds, all these changes affected me less than the wholly inalterable sea.

On the way back we met the other party, also wearing long overcoats and looking pale and uneasy but less silent than we who had already seen the ocean.

## 4

The day we came up from the shelters four people were found dead on the steps of the hotel.

It was apparently not intended that the guests should be informed about this, but one of the security men let the cat out of the bag. He described how he was there when the corpses were taken away and buried. When the last one was lifted up the hair fell down on to the steps, almost like a complete wig. It was the body of a young woman; her face was swollen and her body was covered with small, pimpled sores. The three others were men; their bodies showed no injury, but one of them had small sores on his chest like those of the woman. They must have believed they could get help from the hotel and had lain down on the steps when no one answered their knocking. They undoubtedly came from the villages nearby, which lie about ten kilometres inland. They had all died of radiation sickness.

\*

I am opposed to the management's decision to suppress the news of the four dead bodies. By doing this the management has assumed the role of a superior authority to which it has no right. It is arguable that this time the encroachment is of no great significance, that the secrecy is unimportant and may even have been dictated by consideration, but I am against this line of reasoning.

If the hotel management see themselves as a protective shield between the guests and the outside world, whenever that world is revealed as menacing, they are acting in direct contradiction of their terms of reference. To be *a guarantee of help in a situation*

*which may well turn out to be total chaos*, according to the unhelpful wording of the brochure, does not mean that to conceal the true facts becomes a duty.

I have discussed this with my neighbours and some of the other guests here in the hotel and they do not disagree with me, even if they feel that I attach too much importance to one small incident.

When I put my name down for the hotel a few years ago, as a *guarantee of help*, it was because of the hotel's remote situation, its subterranean provision stores, its access to an uncontaminated water supply, its protective shelters and its assurances about security men and reconnaissance parties. I did not pay the initiation fee and the high monthly instalments in order to be placed in *statu pupillari* and be deprived of the chance of assessing the situation around me.

But perhaps a good many of the guests at Termush are relieved to be spared the harrowing details. Living at Termush does not prove that one is more interested in the world outside than people are in general. What was important when we first enrolled was access to protected accommodation, a hotel with trained staff, stores and a motor yacht lying ready to transport the guests away from this country, should it later become uninhabitable.

Everything was prepared. Even a Noah's ark to take the chosen specimens of humanity to a life in another corner of the globe, complete with gardens and spring water, where one could breathe the air and touch the flowers and fruit without risking fatal injury.

For me registration was a practical step which I was able to take because of my private capital.

Two out of the three times that the Termush establishment sent out emergency calls, they managed to cancel them, because the immediate danger of war had blown over. But we have stayed here once before; we were driven here by bus and brought back a few days later, when the crisis was over. There are a good many more guests now, perhaps because this time the summons took effect on a Friday and staying here could be regarded as a pleasant weekend, if it turned out to be a false alarm. The

weather was warm and the sun shone powerfully from a cloudless sky. But the very first evening we were called down to the shelters. There was no doubt about it. No one could be in doubt about the situation any longer.

\*

Because of my slightly confused state of mind and my private speculations I asked to have my evening meal brought up to my room.

The woman I have mentioned visited me later on; she had noticed that I wasn't in the dining-room. I told her briefly about my worries and explained my absence by saying that I felt slightly unwell.

She asked me to call her by her Christian name, Maria. During the course of the evening she talked to me about her earlier life. It was nothing startling, but expressed with a warmth and tenderness I found attractive. She had been married, but her husband was dead and they had no children. Like me she had taught at one of the universities.

Every evening they broadcast music on the hotel's transmitter. I was listening to the programme, but I must have dozed off and slept a few hours on top of the counterpane. When I woke up it was cold in the room and from the loudspeaker came a monotonous, almost inaudible sound, which has rung in my ears while I have been sitting at the table writing.

## 5

The loudspeaker system was used again to summon us to a meeting, even though the time had been announced the previous day.

The four reconnaissance men sat in the best seats in the lounge, dressed in their protective clothing. The meeting developed into a farewell to them, or rather a ritual designed to emphasize the solidarity between the reconnaissance group and the hotel residents.

The reconnaissance men smiled gravely, as in the photographs of astronauts. Our reconnaissance men are envoys too, both serious, like the explorers of the past, and smiling, like the anonymous space pilots.

A representative of the hotel management and one of the guests proposed the health of the reconnaissance men; the atmosphere was serious but curiously bereft of solemnity. We are filled with a genuine concern, but this is at the same time uncannily wedded to our own private feelings. The attitude of the reconnaissance men shows the same ambiguity; no one in the party can express himself without pulling faces.

On both sides we took up the positions of the day before yesterday; what has happened has burnt up everything permanently; we can expect no change in that situation. The world looks as it did in the second when the disaster struck; we, who remained behind, can move around the immense black crystal, but we are quite incapable of altering it.

We gaze at the dark mass, where buildings, streets, trees, hordes of people, wide stretches of country with farms and herds of cattle are set solid like flies in amber; a hand has gripped a bottle of beer and one can no longer tell the difference between

the hand and the bottle; one face has turned to another and the two faces are forever grafted together; two outstretched arms are ready to hold the child that is running towards them and the child is ready to run to the outstretched arms; a kitchen knife is stuck in the middle of the loaf, even though the person holding the knife had thought through to the end of the slice; water streams out of the taps and the cars are piled up in the streets and nothing of this can be changed; the world has spun full circle and the survivors must exist without it.

I understand our fear of getting involved in the disaster. And the days at Termush go by according to plan; the sun continues to shine, meals are served and music flows out of the loudspeaker. The more we conform to type—and the mirrors in our rooms show that we do conform to type—the more the world will be true to itself. Therefore it is madness to talk about change. We are the living proof of this antithesis.

But I am convinced that we can draw from this a quite opposite conclusion. And under these circumstances it is absolutely essential for us to keep informed about the disaster.

\*

At question time after the meeting I raised the matter of the concealment, as I had decided beforehand.

The management rejected my question; they had already ensured that the security men would commit no more indiscretions. It was the duty of staff and management to clear away unpleasant things in the same way that it was their duty to maintain confidence and cleanliness.

I had expected to get support from some of the other guests, but only one person stood up and he supported the management's statement unequivocally. He was the man who had proposed the health of the reconnaissance team. He cast a few unpleasant remarks in my direction; he insisted that I didn't know what I was talking about and maintained that it was in fact essential to

conceal what could be concealed; indeed, an inspired lie could be preferred to a malignant truth.

It was impossible for me to answer his argument, or rather I refrained from showing my opposition to it.

My misgivings about the authority of the hotel management have not diminished. When the radio reports of the reconnaissance party are delivered, one can no longer assume that they will be uncensored. Neither can one expect that the guests will resist this censorship.

\*

Because of a slight squall there was a ban on going out today. Dust from the surrounding country is drifting in over the hotel, although only in small quantities.

We had to say farewell to the four reconnaissance men through the closed windows of the hall. They set off with their small, light hand-carts laden with equipment and tinned food. At the start of their journey they were already wearing gas-masks and protective clothing, helmets and boots. Therefore they moved slowly and rather clumsily, like underwater divers.

We could follow them for about twenty minutes down to the road into the sealed territory until they vanished behind the cliffs. They walked in their shining costumes like overgrown children with a slight waddle and stoop. I froze at the sight. I think that everyone who was there in the hall felt this chill and a sense of powerlessness, knowing that those four figures were our only chance of a link-up with the world outside. We crossed the stone floor separately without mentioning the events of the day. I went up to my room to be alone.

I shall stay here until lunch is served.



## 6

At night, after a short but heavy shower of rain, the alarm was sounded. The radiation meters on the roof and outside the building set off the electrical alarm system automatically. A moment later we were called down to the shelters.

There was no panic or crush. We gave ourselves time to keep a short distance between us while we went down the steep steps to the big complex of shelters and passages. We felt the direct effect of the depth and the damp on our bodies as we descended.

Before the entrances were bolted and we had dispersed to the various shelters there was an awkward moment. One of the men from the ground floor refused to leave the hotel; he resisted with his arms and legs when people tried to persuade him to come down to the shelters. The doctor was sent for and gave him a sedative injection. The security men carried him down the steps and brought him, half asleep, to the plank bed which had been put up next to mine.

He slept uneasily and the blanket slid off his body several times. Without a conscious decision to do so I slept lightly enough to pick up his blanket for him.

He woke early in the morning and I tried to reassure him by telling him what had happened. He gazed at me a long time before he nodded his head. His eyes were weary.

When he looked round the room he began to explain about his horror of shelters, the dark, armour-plated cellar and the smell of the people there, which grew stronger every hour, their clothes and their skin. He lifted his head and made a feeble gesture with his hand towards the people sleeping on the plank beds. I nodded to show I understood him and he let his head sink back on the blanket.

He talked about the six days we had spent in the shelters after the disaster. On the last day he had lain on his bed in one of the rooms; he had not moved, to keep his thoughts and the rhythm of his body down to a minimum; he had forcibly suppressed his ability to see and hear while he struggled with a rising sense of nausea and dizziness. But the doctor reassured him, these were not the symptoms of radiation sickness.

I asked what the doctor had said it was.

"Claustrophobia," he replied.

"Of course you may have suffered from claustrophobia," I said. "But I don't think there is any point in defining your symptoms too precisely. What is surely more to the point is to decide how the rest of us can continue to keep fit."

"Ah, you mean clear of radiation sickness," he said.

"No, I mean after all we have experienced in the last few days. Or rather all that we have been spared from experiencing, but which we know has happened."

"I get it just the same when we are up in the hotel," he said suddenly. "Or perhaps even more, because it is worst at night. It is as if there were an electric light bulb going round inside my body, in my chest, in my stomach, in my head and my neck. It prevents me from sleeping because all the time some part of my body is sore and lit up and cannot rest. It is not because I keep thinking about what happened; I don't have visions of the corpses or the shattered houses or the people who are still alive with burns on their bodies. But there is something that has changed in the last weeks, perhaps it is something in myself."

"How does the doctor account for it?" I asked.

"He says it is insomnia."

\*

Just before we were called I went out into the corridor. I met Maria. She was leaning against the concrete wall smoking.

We have spent the whole day in the shelters and it keeps on raining. There is considerable pollution; the security men take

readings from the radiation meters at regular intervals.

Maria and I rested our weight against each other in turn, scarcely speaking a word. The exhausted people on all sides, the whispering voices and faces devoid of expression induced in us a feeling of daze. We are not staying down in the shelters because the world is a blazing hell, but because it is raining and the rain makes certain instruments set off the alarm system.

Often someone in the room gets up to go out to the lavatory. The lavatory is the only place where we can find protection from other people. The ventilation is poor and there is damp on the rough walls. But for a moment it is completely quiet; we meet no one's eye and therefore do not need to think about ourselves.

## 7

In the morning we were called back to the hotel and our own rooms.

The rain had stopped in the course of the night and the security men had cleansed the buildings early in the morning. The wind had dropped; the damp was keeping the dust down in the country outside.

The security men dig up the soil again, wash down the cactuses and the bushes and investigate the intensity of the radiation with their Geiger counters. Their movements in their thick suits give no indication of the result. Not until they have conferred with the management do we get a report on the readings.

Over the loudspeaker system we heard about the reconnaissance men's first communiqué. According to the short, abridged summary the group has not encountered survivors in the villages, where only chickens and dogs wander about, stricken by radiation. The reporter used the expression *genuine survivors*, which seems to me both careless and repellent. I assume that he means those survivors who could live longer than a few days.

The degree of radiation is very high everywhere, and almost without exception it gets higher the farther the reconnaissance party move away from the coast.

When I am writing and it grows late, I blot out the last sounds from my neighbours' bedrooms and bathrooms with the music from the loudspeaker.

Often there are long pauses between the end of one piece of music and the announcement of another. I stop writing and wait for the voice, a man's voice, light and a little tired, but very distinct. I do not know whether it is a person staying here in the

building or whether the voice belongs to a tape recording made perhaps when Termush functioned as a hotel and holiday resort.

But I hear in the pauses a quiet breathing, amplified by the loudspeaker and equally clear at my table, a continuous, relaxed breathing, which is now better known to me than any other person in Termush. I can catch four or five breaths before the voice breaks out again.

While I listen I try to imagine his face and hands, but I cannot make up my mind. The remarkably frank voice never gives any clues about the man to whom it belongs. But the almost physical presence of the breathing and the voice continue right on into the music.

\*

I want to write down a dream that I had two nights ago.

Outside the hotel there is a troop of security forces keeping order and cleaning up. They go slowly round by the shore and collect up heaps of dead fish. With calm movements they pile them one on top of the other and are careful to separate the grey fish from the pale pink. But each time they clean up the sand new shoals of fish come drifting up.

Above, across the beach, in the grounds, other security forces are moving. They collect fallen birds on long, pointed poles, starlings, blackbirds, sparrows, their feathers stuck together. The last group of soldiers cut down flowers and bushes and the great cactuses with huge pruning shears. The plants have run riot; they have branched out wildly on all sides and in distorted shapes, but every single misshapen shoot is shorn precisely away.

Suddenly all these security troops turn towards me and I see that they have no faces. Just a smooth, blank oval with no features and no irregularities.

But at the same time I discover that one individual soldier, who remains inside the hotel, has a face that is perfectly complete. He stands in the hall and follows the others with his eyes. Without knowing why, I am sure that he is the person whose voice is

familiar. He does not speak or turn towards me; he stands there in profile and I am trying in vain to make contact with him, when suddenly I wake up.

## 8

At breakfast there was a disturbing incident.

The management and the guests had taken their places in the dining-room; I sat beside Maria, as I have done for the past few days. No one was in the grounds or the front hall.

The food had just been served when the double doors were flung open and a wild-looking man dashed in among the tables. Before anyone could get up to support him he had collapsed and coughed up a thin black fluid on to the floor in front of him.

We stiffened in a half-stooping position, with our chairs pushed away or already on the move past our neighbours. Everyone remembered in that moment the instructions and warnings about touching anything. The response, half curiosity, half desire to help, was cut off in an instant; it was completely still in the dining-room.

One of the doctors went forward to the new arrival. As he moved he put on a pair of thin dark rubber gloves. When he came near the sick man he gripped him by the shoulders and tried to avoid bringing the rest of the man's body in contact with his clothes. He supported him, arms outstretched, to the doors, which two security men held open. They disappeared into the hall on their way to the sick bay.

When the doors were closed, everyone shifted slowly, as if moved by a common impulse, down to the far end of the dining-room, away from the entrance, which one could only reach by stepping across the traces left by the stranger. Perhaps we imagined that these constituted a danger to our lives. To keep some unity in the group and relieve the awkward, troubled silence we all began to watch with intense curiosity as one of the security men, who had put on gloves and a smock, dried and cleaned the

floor, and, almost as if he were giving a demonstration, checked it with a Geiger counter.

One of the three children, whom one hears only seldom when we are together, began to cry and would not let his mother touch him when she reached out to him.

No one seemed inclined to sample the food on the plates, perhaps for fear of contamination, but also because the incident had taken away our appetite. Some people took a piece of bread with them in their hands and we went out into the hall or the lounge, where we stood silent or spent our time pacing up and down beside the windows. I fetched a chair for Maria and sat down on the arm. I felt her shoulder against my side. Neither of us spoke a word.

\*

Later the doctor came into the lounge and told us that the stranger had been examined and his clothes had been burnt to rid him of direct sources of radiation. His weakened state was mainly attributable to the fact that he had not eaten for more than a week. But it was still too early to make a diagnosis. He might be fatally stricken with radiation sickness, even though he now appeared basically healthy.

Just as the doctor was about to leave the room, someone asked a question. "How many sick people can reach Termush, Doctor?"

I did not manage to see the speaker or find out in which group he was standing. I saw that the doctor checked his movement towards the door.

The varied implications of the question became apparent to us. Concern for the injured, consideration of their chances of survival—then more strongly, primitive fear lest Termush should become infested with sick people.

"The man said that he was the only survivor in his village who had the strength to get to Termush," replied the doctor.



"So it is generally known that this place ..." began another voice.

"I think it is best that we should help the injured," the doctor cut in.

He turned and went abruptly out of the room and the guests dispersed.

I saw the details of the lounge décor with remarkable intensity; the faded leather chairs, the lithographs of old castles and mountainous landscapes behind their shining glass, the heavy ornamentation of the ceiling and the dark red paper on the walls, a kind of imitation tapestry. The little rugs that are placed under the occasional tables and the big table for playing cards or discussions.

When I went upstairs with Maria I discovered a mosaic pattern in the stone floor of the hall, a surface where dark and light were shaped according to plan; the groove of the banister rail opened like a miniature chasm under my hand and the rough treads on the stairs sounded noisily under my feet. Suddenly I was startled by the unnerving number of identical doors, the great pitchers which stand and gape, empty of flowers, and the blazing blue carpeting which seems to rise up slantingly along the length of the corridor. Here too there are pictures on the walls, but of a different genre; photographs of hotels on the coast, in varying countries and varying landscapes, but all of them having in common big, dark, rather old-fashioned buildings with endless grounds overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

## 9

Again this morning the management used the loudspeaker system to give out the reconnaissance men's radio reports. The management evidently want to evade the questions that were asked after the meeting in the lounge.

The reconnaissance men had approached the first of the large towns. Only in the suburbs did they find survivors. Most of the people had been so badly injured by burns or radiation that they avoided touching them. The first-aid detachment consisted of about ten men, but some of those were themselves wounded. Everywhere there was a shortage of medicine and pain-killing drugs.

The reconnaissance men had decided not to follow the prescribed route. The radiation intensity was so great that it seemed impossible that there should be survivors. They wanted to stay in the town a few days and continue to help and then follow the irregular boundaries of the radiation-affected areas.

The reconnaissance men asked the management to send their best wishes to the guests at Termush.

\*

The stranger who burst into the hotel yesterday, came, so to speak, into circulation in the lounge after lunch. He had recovered to the point of being able to eat at table and answered all questions in a subdued but willing manner. During the course of the meal he suddenly stood up, stiffly erect, and thanked the hotel's guests and management who had made it possible for him to survive. Because of emotion or weakness he half collapsed when he sat down and had to vomit a little of his food on to his

plate. But none of the guests took offence at this; he had expressed his gratitude for being still alive. The nearest person supported him and one of the servants was able to clear up his mess without using rubber gloves. He nodded and smiled all round and later was able to eat dessert.

In the lounge, while we were drinking coffee and the management was serving brandy in honour of our guest, the stranger answered questions. These were put to him from all sides, pell-mell, one on top of the other, until the man who had earlier figured as spokesman for the management assumed the role of chairman.

The stranger, forbidden by the doctor to drink brandy or coffee, preserved his tired smile while the guests sounded him about his thoughts on the way to Termush, whether he had been anxious about his reception here and whether he had been surprised by the good conditions at the hotel.

He answered briefly and in a weak voice that he had not thought about Termush when he fled; he had only a feeling about which direction he should take. He had not speculated about his reception, because any kind of reception would be an improvement on the situation he had left. Only now he felt well enough to understand how kindly he had been received and how good conditions were at the hotel.

When he sank back wearily on to the chair for a moment the doctor got up and told him to go to bed, but the chairman laid a hand on the doctor's arm and said, "One moment, Doctor. Let us see if there are any more people who want to question our guest."

"There don't seem to be any more," said the chairman, rising to his feet. "I have just one final question to put myself."

"Does our guest think that Termush is generally known as a centre for survival," asked the chairman, "so that people in the villages and the nearest towns have heard about it?"

The sick man nodded. "I think they have all heard of it," he replied calmly.

"That was all," said the chairman, stretching out his hands, "so we will just bid our guest welcome. We are glad that we can place

ourselves at his disposal."

"Thank you, thank you," said the stranger and tried to get up from his chair.

The doctor removed the chairman's hands from the sick man's arm and disappeared with his patient into the hall.

There was silence for a brief moment while some of the guests, apparently by chance, gathered round the chairman. They whispered a few remarks. The chairman and a powerful, dark-haired man nodded silently to each other while the other voices were raised. Shortly afterwards the chairman raised his head and said aloud, "I think we will go up to my room."

Perhaps half the guests in the dining-room accepted his invitation. The others remained seated or stood by the walls as they had done during the questioning. I sat without moving and without reaching any conclusion. I just touched Maria's shoulder to say good night before I went up to my room.

# 10

We expected to find a world completely annihilated. This was what we insured ourselves against when we enrolled at Termush.

No one thought about protecting himself against the survivors or their demands on us. We paid money to go on living in the same way that one once paid health insurance; we bought the commodity called survival, and according to all existing contracts no one has the right to take it from us or make demands upon it.

And suddenly the stranger appears and expects to share in our protection. We do not want to be cynical about it, but Termush will cease to function the moment it opens its doors like a hospital. We agree that water and medicine and the necessities of life should be shared with a few outsiders. But we want to put things on an official footing, draw up regulations. Ten of the wounded can spend the night in the shelters on the understanding that they evacuate the protected area if the guests have need of it.

It is essential for us to look ahead; the first guest will not be the only one.

Sentimentality or uncertainty will not help the stranger and could prevent the inhabitants of Termush from surviving.

After breakfast the chairman and two of his associates went round with lists collecting signatures. They went from table to table using written or verbal arguments, according to the temperament of the person concerned. They wanted to demonstrate to the management the residents' point of view.

Many of us took exception to the petition. But it caught us off guard.

When the names were counted up it appeared that over half the inhabitants of Termush had signed.

\*

We were interrupted by a sudden noise from the hall. When the doors were opened we saw two of the security men in their white suits, which they are supposed to take off as a safety precaution before they come inside the building. They carried between them an old lady, complaining loudly and lifting her head up and down the whole time. Behind her came a young couple. The woman held a child half upright in her arms and the man followed her with his hand on her shoulder and his face looking down at the floor.

None of us could avoid seeing this disturbing sight. The chairman's cynical resolution about rejecting strangers suddenly applied to these actual people. The security men disappeared into the sick bay with the four injured. For a long time we heard the old lady complaining and the child feebly crying.

\*

In the afternoon I sought out the doctor who had treated the strangers. He had finished his examination, and he did not think the old lady would live through the night. The child, too, was suffering from the effects of radiation and a good deal of its skin was burned.

I told him about the petition in the dining-room. He had been prepared for a list of signatures but had not thought it would be possible to acquire so many. He had imagined that the chairman and his colleagues formed, as he put it, a natural minority of opportunists.

I considered that to be an optimistic estimate on his part. He shrugged his shoulders and replied ironically that democracy is based on the vote and that therefore he did not put his faith in democracy.

"I do have some faith in democracy," I replied, "but I don't think that this vote can be regarded as a matter of course as democratic. The voters knew too little about the alternatives."

"They are always ill-informed," said the doctor.

"You are possibly right," I said, "but democracy does depend on certain principles of freedom and these are often more essential than demonstrations of freedom. That vote was a simple demonstration of freedom, but it went against the principle of freedom. It restricted the freedom of the injured, their free right to be helped. For that reason I would not call the vote democratic."

"I can appreciate your argument," said the doctor, "but I doubt whether it can do any good."

"It was just important for me to see where you stood," I said. "In the eyes of the management your opinion is significant."

"I am not involved in the management's decisions," said the doctor, "but naturally I let my opinion be known when I am asked for it. You must realize that I am employed here, like the cooks and the security men, at a very high salary."

\*

My confidence in the doctor is not unlimited. Like the other people at the hotel he is mainly concerned with his status; he is established as chief medical officer. And the rest of us have the status of residents and therefore argue within the limitations prescribed for paying guests. Thus we each fulfil our respective roles so that the world will appear as it was before; your duties extend no further than your rights.

I am opposed to this view. I am convinced that other people in the hotel are too. So far only the chairman has started things moving, but the distance between his arguments and action is a short one, unless there are obstacles in the form of doubts and reservations. I am convinced that the doctor and I will agree when more is at stake than an old-fashioned academic discussion argued from two positions in the same room.

# 11

The management has replied to us.

The management has assured us that under no circumstances will they make inroads on the store of provisions which is reserved for the guests. The management has no difficulty in understanding the feelings of the guests about the injured. It is natural that they should want to help them, but it is equally natural that they should not want the place to be overrun by strangers. The management believes that we can all agree to accept a reasonable number of those in distress with the proviso that the guests' rightful possessions remain intact. The management realizes that the harrowing sight of injured and distressed people must be a strain on the guests. This they have taken measures to prevent. One of the security men has orders to patrol the neighbourhood, the outskirts of the grounds and the drive at regular intervals. If a number of strangers appear, asking for help, one of the screened doors in the side wing will be used as an entrance in future.

\*

In the lounge I spoke against yesterday's resolution. My statement was supported by Maria and some individual guests.

The chairman jumped up and used the full force of his rhetoric to prove me lacking in a sense of reality.

"No one wants to help more than I do," he said, "but at the same time I look the danger of disaster straight in the eye. A few days ago we were told that the group of reconnaissance men had stopped in a strange town to help with clearance work. I see that as a danger too. We have placed our whole confidence in these reconnaissance men and if they are not giving us full-time service



where are we to turn? How are we to preserve our means of survival?"

For a moment there was a slight disturbance where the management was sitting. People leaned over to each other, made signs with their hands or shook their heads.

Then one of them stood up to speak, prompted by the others.

"According to the latest reports the reconnaissance men are still in the distressed town. But they have received information that can set them on the trail of other survivors or places in the country where the damage caused by fall-out or direct destruction is so slight that they can be inhabited. The management understands the guests' impatience but appeals to their confidence in the reconnaissance men's co-operation and to their trust in the management itself."

No one asked leave to speak after the management's reply. The chairman's total lack of consideration seemed to have silenced his opponents. But his powerful obstinacy, his primitive blend of cunning and stupidity attracts supporters to rally round behind him.

I build up in my imagination a satisfying mental picture of the chairman as a Roman charioteer, coarse, stiff-backed, standing on his chariot holding the reins of many horses in his left hand and a whip in his right, thinking only about driving the other chariots into the ground.

\*

Just before we went into breakfast the management invited us to take a trip in a motor yacht tomorrow, weather permitting.

There was a brief murmur of surprise and gratitude, as in a class at school. Everyone nodded and smiled in the direction of the management, after which the servants announced breakfast.

At the lower end of the room, close to the kitchen door, stood a smaller table, laid for the three strangers. The one who arrived first and the young couple were all well enough to eat. The young man followed the woman into the room with his hand on her

shoulder as he did yesterday. They all sat in silence and were served with a meal which was clearly not the same as ours. The new regulations have already come into force.

\*

Because of the events of the past few days I have scarcely been aware of myself as an individual. I have not stayed in my own room; I have had no desire to work out the lines of demarcation between the hotel and myself.

After breakfast I felt completely exhausted. I slept on my bed for several hours and then got up when Maria came in with tea for both of us. We talked about what had happened. She thinks that opposition to the chairman will grow in the coming days.

Maria went down to the dining-room, but I asked to have lunch brought up. In the half-light Monet's poppies glowed arrogantly in the grass.

The mirror reflected from my corner part of the plate and my left hand which lay outstretched on the napkin. I was seized by a sudden feeling of chill. Is it my doubts and reservations about the developments at Termush or is it simply fatigue? Outside the wind has started to blow, a continuous dull sound from the beach below the grounds and in the distant trees. There will be no expedition by motor yacht tomorrow, but the management has demonstrated its goodwill.

If the wind increases it is quite possible that the radiation meters will trigger off the alarm. I do not know how dangerous the dust is now or in what quantities it is drifting over the hotel.

I listen to the music from the loudspeaker and to the voice which, despite its anonymity, addresses itself more directly to me than the speakers in the lounge. It is as if this voice were purely and simply self-contained, as if it referred to nothing outside itself, unlike the other voices in Termush. In the evening I heard a faint, suppressed cough between the announcements. I take this as a sure sign that the voice belongs to someone here in the hotel; in a tape recording a fault like that would have been cut out.

During lunch it is completely quiet in the corridors. I listened to the loudspeaker and opened my door; I could not hear the faintest sound from the dining-room. Suddenly I feel I am in the space between two breaths, in the moment of time it takes to stretch out a hand to another person, in the second when the heart beats and braces itself to beat again. I stand and wait with nothing to wait for. Am I on board a ship at sea, in a house in a park, in a town in a country? Is nothing changed, can everything be swept away as a dream is swept out of the conscious mind in the morning?

I turn back and go into my room to wait for Maria.

# 12

Late at night the alarm went off.

It was not raining, but the wind was blowing in dust from the contaminated countryside roundabout and the maximum limit was exceeded. The continuous, almost physical sound of the alarm had not lasted long before doors were opened, and the guests, wearing overcoats over their night clothes or half-dressed carrying their shoes in their hands, pressed forward one behind the other on the way to the steps.

It is more the disturbing sound than the actual warning which creates the first wave of panic. Perhaps it makes a difference, too, if the alarm happens at night. The sudden awakening makes everyone vulnerable and frightening images and associations stir all too readily in the mind.

But there is no reason why chaos should break out because the alarm has sounded. The limit of radiation intensity which is set as a maximum is a point arbitrarily chosen. A rate a few degrees lower than the radiation meters permit could, over a long period, cause more serious damage than an excessive rate over a short period. At the hotel the radiation meters are read regularly and according to the management we can feel safe, but who weighs all the shades in the balance, all the small organisms that accumulate in the body? There is no need to panic because of the alarm; it is not that which heralds disaster.

I have not made these observations to show my opposition to the management, which does all in its power to reassure us with its alarm system and security men. The management has exploited our wish for infallible systems: here is the water, there is the land, no one can make a mistake. Up to this line there is no danger; on the other side of the line waits certain death.

Therefore the alarm wails and the guests flee from their rooms with their clothes fluttering round them. The illusion of complete safety so long as the margin is not reached bears the reverse implication of complete panic once the margin is exceeded. It is easier to choose these sharp demarcation lines than uncertainty in our individual situation; the adjustment has been so small that in itself it is not disastrous, but it could contribute to disaster.

The dispersal arrangements in the shelters were marked by confusion and fatigue. The camp beds were put up and everyone lay down half-dressed to sleep a little before morning. For my own part I lay sleepless for the rest of the night, but by morning I must have fallen asleep, for I awoke feeling heavy and physically sick as the beds were being noisily stacked together.

The all-clear was sounded just after we climbed slowly up the steps.

\*

I think that staying in the shelters takes more out of us than anything else. I see a bewilderment and despair in the waiting faces that during those hours threatens to wipe out all natural expression. What appears to be a permanent likeness when we are above ground can be obliterated in a moment when we go down the steps.

Life in our rooms can be confused with the protected, unambiguous life of before the disaster. Life in our rooms is based on this confusion.

The confusion would be more complete if the Termush authorities had built a new world underneath the contaminated land. Instead of shelters, houses and streets could have been built, with trees and gardens. Infra-red lamps could provide the heating; air could be pumped down through a filter and water up through the sewage system. Each individual could own his own house. Lunch could be served in a big, brightly lit restaurant, breakfast could be served in a garden with little tables and rococo bridges over underground waterways.

Every morning the servants would come swinging through the garden gate with coffee; messages from the management would be sent out like a local paper. The next generation would not know that the world had ever been any different.

No, the birth of a next generation would have to be prevented by sterilization. The system would work so long as the paid manpower and the underground provisions, both originating in the old, uninhabitable world, could last out. One could make no calculations for the next generation.

\*

The strangers, the injured and the errant reconnaissance men we can discuss and make arrangements about. They penetrate our consciousness, but they do not change it in any way. We hold meetings just as we always have in political societies and discussion groups. We vote for and against and reach a conclusion. It is like a rather crudely managed game.

In the shelters we cannot assume any role. We sit there as if we were refugees. When the all-clear is sounded and we drag ourselves up the steps, our count of red corpuscles has already gone down. We do not lift up our heads until we have arrived back in our rooms.

I knew that Maria was sitting at her table waiting for me to come. But I had not the strength to get up from my bed. I had a painful cramp in my neck and shoulders when I reluctantly had to tidy myself up to go down to lunch.

# 13

The management has informed us that one of the guests has fled from Termush.

Yesterday a rumour went round and I paid no attention to it. Nobody knew the deserter or when the flight took place. I put down the story to the phoney excitement after we came back from the shelters, the nervous tension, expressing itself in exaggerated anecdotes. The rumour was retained with a strange enthusiasm, more as a stimulating piece of news than a tragic event.

The refugee is the man that I talked to one night in the shelters. I have only just remembered that his face was missing when we were all sitting there together on chairs or benches early in the morning.

He fled shortly after the alarm sounded. During the past few days he had collected some provisions; he knew that he did not want to go down to the shelters again.

In a farewell letter he describes in detail how he dressed himself in an overcoat and a pair of stout boots to protect his body. He thinks that he has food enough for eight or ten days. I do not know whether he has written the letter to reassure the guests at Termush or to convince himself that flight is feasible.

He may have said other things in his letter, perhaps about conditions in Termush, but the management did not wish to reproduce it. According to their account he himself referred to his fear as claustrophobia. But I am convinced that he used the word in a far broader sense than we are accustomed to.

Without talking about it, perhaps without being conscious of it, he reacted against this enclave, this closed compartment cut off from the world. He had not wished to or had not been in a

position to resume the interrupted game of make-believe that nothing had happened. He felt cramped by the restrictions of the place, the rhythm of the day, the petty bickering at the meetings and the unacknowledged fear which rears its head when we are down in the shelters, and which, like nakedness, we conceal.

This is the meaning of the word claustrophobia as he applied it to himself, or more accurately, it is against this that his body reacted.

\*

The old lady who arrived at the hotel a few days ago died in the night. The condition of the child had deteriorated; it is difficult to contain the infection and the blood has lost its power to congeal. Neither the doctor nor the male nurse can establish a relationship with the parents. The man was blinded by one of the explosions and neither he nor the woman shows any sign of interest. When people try to make contact with them, they cling to each other in lethargy or fear.

Without the guests being informed more injured people have arrived in Termush. One died shortly afterwards of his injuries, but the doctor thinks that the two others will survive.

The strangers stay in the sick bay; we are told nothing about their condition. The three able-bodied ones are no longer seen in the dining-room; their table has disappeared, but the management has offered no explanation.

\*

I allowed myself to wander round the hall and out into the park, along the paths that edge the walls of the building. It was my intention to meet the doctor or try to listen to see if I could hear the strangers in the sick bay. I did not clarify my purpose; as I walked I felt increasingly perplexed. It was just before sunset and the damp air from the sea had already begun to chill me. I met no



one in the grounds and no one in the hall, but I did not want to go up to my room.

When I turned back after trying to see through the frosted glass into the sick bay, the chairman was standing there behind me. He stared me blankly in the face. I could not respond to him nor could I explain to myself why I felt paralysed.

I have always been interested in my environment, but I have wanted to reach my conclusions about it in peace. I have stressed a person's right to observe and clarify his thoughts without being obliged to intervene. Intervention could prevent free observation; it meant that one was no longer unprejudiced or open to all points of view.

My position at the university taught me to give preference to this method. It is in fact the scientific principle of observation and can thus easily be applied to the rest of existence. I wanted above all to avoid over-simplification, and individual action appeared to be a form of simplification.

In the past few days I have seen the basis of my conceptions become changed. To my own surprise I suddenly want to intervene, not to observe, but to try to alter the course of events. I want to seek out the doctor, I want to set up a committee, a group of enthusiasts who can take up a joint attitude to what happens. We could ensure that the chairman was not the only motive force in Termush.

I am sitting at my table making these notes. The exercise makes me for a moment tired and slightly dizzy. All my ideas about how to act affect my body like strong drink or a fall in the barometer. I know that I am no longer young and that weakness of will can appear as flabbiness in the muscles of my body.

\*

I have found a little transistor radio.

While I lie on the bed holding the small shiny box I feel excited, almost rebellious.

This feeling provides a momentary distraction, but I do not want to be diverted from my thoughts about what is happening in Termush.

Suddenly Maria's face becomes part of the picture. I see her laugh, even though I cannot remember her laughing at anything. She laughs and turns her head, her slim legs moving across the beach, her back towards me. Her coat swings lightly and she has something in her hand as she draws further and further away from where I am standing. The sun strikes a glitter from the surface of the sea and the light affects her outline like an unstable acid, threatening to obliterate it. But she passes through the field of light and continues along the beach, very small, sharply defined, so far away that I can no longer distinguish the colour of her hair and I cannot see if she suddenly turns towards me. The beach curves away.

I want to try and recall her features when she has disappeared from sight, but my picture comes out blurred and inadequate and I cannot get it in focus. The face has no expression now. She does not laugh and there is no power in her eyes. Her face is dead.

Lying on the bed I switch on the radio and slowly move the hand of the dial. The weak, regular whirring intensifies at one or two places on the scale but there is not a trace of the transmitting stations. I lie there for a long time listening to the obscure whirring sound, changing the wavelength, moving the dial and listening again. It is like looking at an enormous, familiar house, which is evacuated and empty. I recognize the window frames, the street and side doors, the simple ornamentation of the outside walls, the drain-pipes and the gutters. But in the windows the panes are missing and behind them yawns an empty space. The entrance and the doors are locked, but the rooms are empty and floors and partition walls have been removed. The façade hangs there like a thin sheet of paper, but the contents have gone and the trellis is bare of plants.

After I had turned off the radio I went in to Maria.

I had bought a bottle of wine, which we shared in her room after lunch.

I told her that earlier in the day she had gone down to the beach and turned her back on me, but that I had watched her with a feeling of happiness, as if she had been coming nearer all the time.

She looked at me and smiled gently. She was not surprised.

I went close to her and let my hand rest against her throat. She did not move, but kept looking at me the whole time.

It was as if she had known it longer than I had.

# 15

This morning the management invited the guests out for a trip by boat. The air was calm and there was no sign of a change in the weather. The boat was due to leave directly after breakfast; we were asked to go down the steps leading from the observation point to the beach. The security men had sluiced down and cleaned the rocks and cut away the nearest bushes and cactus plants.

I got up from the breakfast table and went into the sick bay to have a talk with the doctor. A number of nurses and security men were bustling about with instruments and bedlinen. None of them could tell me where the doctor had gone.

When I was standing in the front hall he came down the stairs.

"I have been busy," he said at once.

"Are you in favour of the management's boat trip?" I asked. "Or has it been arranged to silence the criticisms of the guests? There is no protection at sea, if there should be a depression in the atmosphere."

"I am in favour of the management's boat trip," he said, looking me straight in the eye. "Believe me, I am wholeheartedly in favour of the management's boat trip."

He stood there for a moment and laid his hand on my arm.

I moved out of his way and he went into the sick bay.

I told Maria about my conversation. She slowly nodded her head. She thought the doctor's reaction was a guarantee that the trip was not dangerous. I agreed to keep calm, as she put it, and go with her to the boat.

Just before we left one of the security men went round the corridors calling to the remaining guests. I asked whether there

were many who were staying in their rooms. He said that everyone who was not on the sick list ought to go on the boat.

"You said that as if it was not a voluntary activity," I said.

"Of course it is voluntary," he replied.

\*

The grounds were bathed in sunlight.

Our limbs are already out of practice at moving over large surfaces. It was difficult to follow the path across the grass, not because I walk uncertainly, but because our eyes have become accustomed to meeting walls, steps, landings and doors everywhere and the open, unfamiliar spaces affect our vision as if they were precipices.

The cactus plants stood like monuments made of interlocking glass; the trees and bushes were further away than ever at the edge of the lawns. Only the rock formations towered up as before, stripped of all vegetation, but having a recognizable shape.

The first time we went down to the observation platform I offered Maria my arm. Now I had to look for support from her because of a slight dizziness. I did not mention that I felt unwell because I did not want to cause her anxiety or to emphasize the feeling myself. Through my right arm I was aware of her calm balance and I did not need to strain my eyes to follow the twists of the path.

At the far end of the grounds, below the platform, stood the hotel's collection of statues. Flights of steps and small paths led us among them; the way had been purposely designed to take the hotel's guests past each individual statue.

The management had described the collection of statues in the brochure as its most prized possession. But not until a few days ago had the figures and their surroundings been cleansed by the security men. This was announced over the loudspeaker system with considerable enthusiasm.

If by impressive one means exaggerated, these figures were impressive. Gigantic lions and tigers in stone, lying with their limbs

curled under to follow the shape of the stone. They were curious forms, the bodies like great ill-defined blocks, designed more to evoke a sense of weight and mass than to suggest power in the muscles and sinews. The animals had their heads raised and stared out over the sea or in towards the hotel with great arched eyes.

In the ploughed-up and trampled gardens these stone creatures are the sole survivors. The security man who followed us walked slowly so that we should have time to become engrossed in them. He himself stood a little to one side, as if he were afraid of stealing the picture from the animals.

\*

The trip by motor yacht lasted three hours. We sat close together in two small saloons or on the sun deck. Each new movement, setting out the chairs, serving chilled white wine, was remarked on by the guests.

The sensation of being at sea we felt only in the long swells that made the boat rise and fall. The tight rows of people made it impossible for the surface of the sea to seem other than an illustration, a proof that we were taking a trip by boat. Even though it was the first time we had been anywhere outside Termush we sat silent, sunk in our own thoughts. We all felt the similarity between the boat trip and a stay in the shelters. The management's invitation, the serving of white wine, none of this could shake us out of our numbness. We sat opposite each other, beside each other, on top of each other and tried to avoid catching anyone's eye or reacting to anyone's movements. We retreated into ourselves, let ourselves be protected by our silence and the clothes we were wearing.

Throughout the entire voyage the high, mountainous coastline lay within our field of vision. For a long time Termush gleamed white among its parkland, but it faded as the sun rose in the sky. We went past a rocky island that stood up from the surface of the sea like a dark, square block. Suddenly the air became cold,

though afterwards I did not know whether this was due to the broad shadow of the rock or to a feeling within me at the sight of the island. I was standing on deck, but I came below when the boat turned round to sail back to the coast.

One of the children who had been sitting still and had not shown the slightest interest in going above from the saloon, began to cry on the way back. He cried quietly, but with a steady sobbing and his hands in front of his face. He lay with his head in his mother's lap and she laid a hand on his back but did not move him.

When the boat had gone alongside we came slowly off to land. No one had been keen to arrive for lunch in the hotel.

We went past the stone figures, the observation platform and through the grounds to the main steps. I did not want to lean on Maria, but I kept close to her and from time to time I touched her hand.

\*

When I sat in my room after lunch I was seized by a violent pain in my heart. I did not know whether this was due to the effort of walking along the beach or to anxiety about what is happening at Termush. It is impossible to define the situation; my own desire to distinguish between friends and enemies perhaps prevents me from seeing clearly.

I stayed in my room for the afternoon and again in the evening.

Maria comes and goes, almost without my noticing it.



# 16

While we were away from Termush yesterday more than twenty injured people arrived at the hotel.

The management had worked out a plan and just waited for a day when the weather made it possible for the guests to stay outside the building.

At a meeting in the lounge the management explained the circumstances.

They had, out of consideration for the guests, spared them the sight of the injured and maimed. They had done everything to ensure that there was no encroachment of the freedom of the guests or their rightful possessions. It had been necessary to turn the library into a place for the strangers to stay, but shelves with books and magazines would be put up in the lounge in the course of a few days. They had laid claim to a minimal amount of space in the shelters; it simply meant that when the alarm sounded, children and their mothers would be allowed to stay in the women's section, where the previous day the places had not been fully occupied. The management concluded by reminding us that the strangers' meals were always prepared from food that did not belong to the guests.

There was a benumbed silence in the lounge after this speech. Neither the chairman nor his closest followers showed any sign of commenting on what had been said. As a demonstration of his importance or a token of his impotence the chairman rose to his feet and left the meeting.

The management emphasized that no more injured people would be admitted to Termush. All concerned had stretched their resources to the limit; the management thanked the guests for their understanding.

I began to be able to read the guests' slowly formed opinions. Not as clearly defined points of view but as vague impulses or ephemeral convictions. They were reassured, but anxious; they did not know whether to incline towards confidence or distrust. They got up and went out of the lounge without saying much.

I felt personally an enormous relief, a mute sense of elation. My most worrying suspicions and ideas melted away. But at the same time I had a stirring of anxiety about the situation. I did not dare to put my confidence either in the management's determination or the guests' perceptiveness.

\*

The doctor was standing rocking on his heels when I found him in the hall, by the steps down to the shelters.

I saw from his expression that his was a cheerful nervous excitement.

I stopped with my back to the wall within earshot of him. I did not ask him any questions or invite him to speak.

"The deputy medical officer and I threatened to resign if the injured were forbidden access to Termush," he said a little later. "The management made us promise that these were the last ones we would receive. In return the hotel would stand solidly behind us in dealing with the guests. Those were the conditions. We were obliged to accept."

"The management is scared," I said.

"They are scared lest the guests should take legal action against them," he replied.

"In what court?" I asked.

The doctor gave me a rapid glance.

"The management is also scared of losing its chance of survival," he said. "Each injured person represents a threat to that chance."

"But you, Doctor," I asked, "what do you want to do about the injured?"

"The sick are my stock in trade," he said calmly.

\*

I walked alone in the grounds just before the sun went down. The garden was accessible because the weather was set fair.

On my way to the observation platform I saw Maria coming towards me. She laughed as if she had not expected to see me and stretched out her open, upturned hand towards me when I was still a little distance from her. In the palm of her hand was a dark object.

She stopped still, holding her open hand motionless and waited for me.

Suddenly a man in shining uniform emerged from the bushes behind her and ran silently up the path. She did not catch sight of him, for he pushed into her so violently that she half fell on to the flagstones of the path.

I was starting to run down to them when I realized that the stranger was one of the security men. He had already taken off his gloves and stood bending over her to help her to her feet.

"You must not touch them," said the security man.

"What was it you were holding in your hand?" I asked.

"A bird, a dead bird," she answered.

"It is forbidden to touch them," said the security man, "they are certain to be infected. You must go into the sick bay and be examined."

I wanted to help Maria and go up to the hotel. But I caught sight of the bird, which had been thrown into the rough grass at the side of the path. It was brown and quite small. I turned to the security man who was just drawing on his gloves.

"Are there many of them?" I asked.

"Every morning," he said, "at least there are most in the morning."

Before we reached the hotel Maria collapsed into my arms. I realized that the man's sudden assault had released her fear.

In the sick bay her hands were disinfected and her clothes were examined. The assistant doctor was careful and silent and gave her two sedative tablets.

As we went into the hall together I heard the injured crying out from the library. The sound was naked and long-drawn out. Perhaps that was due also to the fact that the room had been cleared of furniture and carpets to make room for the beds.

In the night the hotel was roused from sleep.

A continuous yelling, which sounded like somebody having a wild party, was interrupted by a thump on the stairs. I heard doors being opened and guests running out into the corridor as the cheerful bawling started up again.

Later than both my neighbours I recovered my balance and summoned up sufficient will-power to open the door.

On the carpet in the corridor stood one of the guests, a man I had noticed earlier as a silent spectator with a tired smile. He was wearing pyjamas and stood swaying his head as the residents crowded round him.

Just as I came out of the door he half collapsed, laughing and babbling, while several arms saved him from falling over on to the carpet. It was only then that I caught sight of the carved-up carcase of a calf that he had dragged behind him up the stairs.

He tried several times to get near the animal, but the guests prevented him from touching it, as if that in itself was a danger. They stared doggedly at the stairs, where the assistant doctor appeared shortly afterwards.

The helpful guests let go of the man too soon and he got to the calf before the doctor. Four arms had hold of him as he wept loudly, tossing his head. The doctor prepared to give him a sedative injection.

When the patient had been helped down the steps to the sick bay, the guests disappeared into their rooms. The calf was left lying there; I saw it clearly in the circle of light under one of the lamps. The legs stood out from the headless body; the belly was slit open and the hide was half ripped off. The colours were blurred, as in a dummy of painted wood and leather.

Although I knew that the animal had come out of the deep freeze, I tested to see if I could find traces of blood in the corridor or on the stairs. It was cold on the carpet where the carcase had lain.

\*

The man had run amok in the kitchen, where he had found some bottles of wine and had drunk or smashed half a dozen. In the meat larder he had pulled the calf down from the hook.

Nobody had seen what he was doing until he dragged the calf's carcase up the stairs and in his terrified state of drunkenness collapsed in the corridor.

He remained lying in the sick bay. The management let it be known at breakfast that the damage was slight and that special locks had been placed on the doors of the kitchen.

In answer to a question from a guest the management said that no action would be taken against the man who had run amok. It was not the hotel's business to administer punishment, only to take precautions and offer reassurance.

\*

During the course of the afternoon there arose an inexplicable agitation among the guests.

It had without doubt some connexion with the destructive incident in the kitchen. Many felt that to be a bewildered and innocent attempt to break away from the set conventions, a kind of return to the rebellion of youth. But those who sympathized most with his behaviour were also those who had the most confidence in the management's security arrangements. They felt excited by his exploit but wanted at the same time to prevent it happening.

The agitation showed itself in the groups of people who kept breaking out of the hotel and wandering down through the grounds so far towards the boundaries that several times the

security men had to intervene and stop them. The observation platform became filled with guests, who split up into small groups and went down the steps between the stone statues or down to the beach, where they let themselves be driven to and fro by a common curiosity as to what lies hidden behind the two cliffs marking the edge of our territory.

In the afternoon the alarm went off.

Most of the guests were in the hotel; the weather had turned colder and the sky was overcast with cloud. I saw from the windows of the hall that the last ones ran up towards the building, bunched together, attacking the flagstones as if the very earth were preventing them from escaping at speed.

We waited for the injured to be carried from the library down to the shelter steps. Many turned away, affecting to be preoccupied, or in acknowledged fear of what they might see. I noticed that many of the strangers had facial injuries or had bandages on their arms or legs. But most of them simply lay there exhausted, the pupils of their eyes abnormally large in their emaciated faces. None of them complained or cried out while they were being moved. I could not decide whether this was due to something soothing in the way the beds were moved or to a collective consideration for the guests.

We were installed in the shelters, each in our section and our place. We sank into our familiar passivity with no sign of reaction or emotion.

But I had to ask myself whether the alarm had been essential this time or whether it had been ordered by the management as a form of therapy to reduce tension.

Early in the evening the all-clear was sounded. I went up to my room, without having the energy to contact Maria or to listen to the music from the hotel's loudspeaker. But I lay restless for a long time before I fell asleep.

I tried to prolong my sleep in the morning to make up for a wretched night. I avoided going down to breakfast and kept the curtains at my windows tightly closed. But I remained in a state between sleeping and waking, a stage in which there drifted through my mind half-sentences, sounds from neighbouring rooms and visual impressions, though my eyes were shut.

At a moment when I was deeply not superficially asleep Maria came in. She managed to pull back the curtains and sit down on my bed before I woke up.

I saw from her nervous, shining eyes and her unruly hair that she was deeply agitated.

I sat half up in bed, confused by her expression and my own slight feeling of guilt at having slept so long. I waited for new stories about the management or the chairman. To clear my brain I fixed my attention on a distant point outside the window, the top of one of the large trees.

But Maria waited until I looked her in the face. It was nothing to do with the management or the chairman, it was to do with herself.

\*

During the night her brain had tried to shut out thoughts of radiation. Whichever way she turned, she saw the picture; the weak, grey light which streamed down from the sky, out of the walls and up from the earth and the floor. A faint radiance lay over the landscape, the outlines of the trees, the contours of the mountains, the beach, the stone statues; all this was, as it were, veiled in a watery sheen that seemed to repeat and exaggerate



the original shapes. And she saw the hotel residents wandering about in the landscape as if they were part of an old-fashioned painting.

The distance between the figures was great; they were all a long way away and had their backs turned towards the observer. They were dressed in bizarre clothes as if to emphasize the tragic in their existence. The trees and mountains had enclosed these beings like polyps, but at the same time they themselves had become organic creatures, covered in fur or skin. That light streamed out of every object; it shone through robes and skin and the flesh on the bones, the leaves on the trees and the moss on the mountains; it seemed suddenly to reveal the innermost, vulnerable marrow of people and plants, the sensitive growth tissue, the chalk, the iron, the blood.

She was aware of this as if the radiation were visible to her alone, as if she, because of some defect, were the only person to have an impression of universal contamination.

She had thought about my waning confidence in the management. And she saw for herself how every single day the hotel guests were exposed to this invisible radiation, while the management neglected to call them down to the shelters for fear of spreading panic. That morning just before she got up she was seized by a powerful dread.

I made no reply to her when she had finished speaking. I had no power to corroborate her story or to deny it. I could dismiss her fantasies about the management deceiving the guests. But I could not contradict the ideas from which the fantasies had arisen. They contained an insight that could only be captured in a slow, shocked picture.

\*

We went down into the gardens and I took her arm without asking her whether she needed my support.

I wanted to take her mind away from the bewildering vision. I got involved in talking about Termush in the past, a past which

covered the place like a tight mask, confining its inhabitants.

When one thought about it, it was like setting the dark, old-fashioned paintings in motion.

Royal carriages or noblemen's coaches driving over the gravel to the main steps. Servants, gently bowing from the waist, standing at the door, or darting past the carriage wheels with incredible agility. Women with great billowing skirts and pleasant, nervous smiles. Men in dark costumes standing out like knife-blades. Everywhere the hands of servants in protective white gloves, scores of hands among the baggage, in the doorway, and later lifting the coats from the guests' shoulders.

Horses steaming with sweat and urine, the coachman and the groom waiting to take them away. But there is still a figure inside the carriage, where the sun illuminates a square of plush and coloured tassels.

The management of the hotel receives the company, waiting at the side of the steps like a row of cypresses. The guests nod absent-mindedly and the black figures bend for a moment at the waist. A flock of screaming swallows swoops into the yard. But there is still one figure remaining in the carriage; the door is half open showing the plush and coloured tassels. One of the servants is there and does not move from his place.

The slender, large-eyed guests, smelling of perfume, have disappeared into the building. The sun shines down on the courtyard.

Suddenly a stout, brownish woman comes waddling out of a carriage right down by the stables. She walks badly and nearly twists her shoes over in the gravel. When she reaches the royal carriage she flings open the door, and at once the flunkey lays a white hand on it. She steps on to the footboard and bends down, her fat behind blocking the doorway.

The nurse takes the child out of the carriage. He is dressed in dark blue velvet with a silk collar and small gleaming shoes. There is madness in his face, in the eyes devoid of eyelashes and the tongue protruding from the almost lipless mouth. Hair grows sparsely on his scalp and his ears are two deformed flaps of

gristle. The nurse disappears up the steps and in through the door, her hand clutching the child's wrist.

The child does not make a sound but stares about him with wandering eyes as he totters over the gravel and up the steps.

Only then can the carriage drive across the yard and the servants return to the house, whose main door is already closed.

\*

Maria fell asleep when we came back. She had said nothing while I was speaking. She had turned pale and there was no strength in her body when she lay down on my bed.

While she slept I walked around the passages and corridors to the steps and across the floor of the hall and I saw everything more distinctly than before. Every single detail in the dark, carved wardrobes, the pew seats along the walls, the heavy clusters of decoration on the tables and chairs, the tapestry-like folds above the bookshelves.

The building was empty of guests; no royal kinsmen or rich men's families with their household gods or other expensive eccentricities. The guests of my own time were all in their rooms sleeping, or sitting at their tables lost in thought.

When I came back I noticed that the mirror did not reflect my face in as fine a detail as had marked my own observations of the hotel's interior. But Maria was awake and I suddenly met her eyes in the mirror over my shoulder.

# 19

The doctor has given instructions for twelve people to be isolated in the shelters.

The guests' dosimeters show no danger, but the urine analysis this morning recorded a sharply rising precipitation of radioactive materials.

The hotel's lists have been gone through to find the points of contact between the twelve guests. Where their rooms are situated, the people they preferred to walk with in the grounds or eat with in the dining-room.

The food is being checked. Suspicion centres on a bowl of fruit which was left standing in one of the washrooms before it was put on the table.

The management read out the list containing the names of the twelve guests. Among the healthy ones there arose a quite shameless curiosity. I noticed a woman just in front of me who kept her head erect, making no attempt to bend or turn round. When we got up from our chairs I realized she was on the list.

\*

In the afternoon there was hectic activity.

The chairman set his supporters to work.

The twelve guests packed their suitcases and went down to the shelters, where one of the rooms had been specially prepared. They kept silent, as if by talking they might bring infection to the rest of us, or as if isolation was a judgement on them.

We talk about the sick people with sympathy. But their illness has filled us with a peculiar excitement. It is as though we, who have not been sent down to the shelters, had been given an

opposite diagnosis, fit, able to survive, uninfected. We have escaped; we have never felt more full of vitality since the disaster. Somewhere in the shelters underneath us the sick section is housed, the amputated limb which guarantees the health of the rest of the body.

After dinner the chairman appealed to the management to formulate new emergency regulations. Unreserved generosity to strangers outside Termush had resulted in the infection of twelve guests. He got up noisily from the table, but was interrupted by the doctor, who stretched out his arm and shouted that this was a lie.

Amid the disturbance that followed the management fetched its two witnesses.

A young couple walked through the dining-room, past the rows of tables. She was pale and her dark hair drifted across her cheeks. He walked behind her, his head bowed.

One of the management staff explained that the young woman's attention had been distracted by her friend, a security man. He had come in from the area beyond the grounds and had put down his protective clothing in the washroom. The girl put down the bowl near his clothing and the fruit became contaminated by the dangerous dust that had clung to the material.

"A tragic misfortune," concluded the management.

"We have tried to insure against it by strict regulations."

The girl looked up for a moment and moved her lips as if she wanted to speak. But no sound came and she turned sharply round and steadied herself against her friend, who led her out of the room. When they came past me I noticed that it was the same security man who had forbidden Maria to touch the dead bird.

Silence fell among the guests. No one moved.

There was a sudden shout.

"Reconnaissance men. Scouts. Where are the scouts?"

The management reacted, apparently unprepared. Two of the staff stood up at the same time and began to speak. But nobody was listening; the question had grown to an intense and powerful

murmur. While the two men leaned towards each other or turned to face the guests words were thrown backwards and forwards.

Only when the chairman stood up and stretched out his arms over the assembled company was there quiet.

"Let us hear the management's explanation," he said, a sudden grin lighting up his face.

"Our reconnaissance men have been sparing with information," said one of the men. "We only know that they have left the disaster-stricken town and are following a new route."

"The radio link has broken down several times," called out the other.

"The radio link has not been working properly," the first man repeated in a lower voice. "We regret these mistakes. We beg you to be patient."

They both remained standing there irresolute. Then the chairman made a sign to show that the meeting was over.

The guests got up immediately. They left the dining-room not one by one, but in a kind of panic. They pushed their way out of the doors and spread rapidly into the hall, across the steps or into the garden.

I heard more distinctly than ever before the moaning of the injured from the library.

I went up to my room alone, confused by the violence of events.

I was not able to foresee these incidents; I cannot place them in context. My imagination is numb; I have forced myself to change round the pictures, clean the wash-basin and examine the glossy surface of the furniture for dust—all to prove my ability to master my surroundings.

I have been walking about preoccupied with vague premonitions and conjectures. I cannot visit the doctor or talk to Maria. I lie down on my bed. I have been writing for a long time against an almost unmanageable fatigue.

I woke up suddenly in the night. I could hear no sound round about me; I had lain for a long time without moving, as if the bedclothes were made of asphalt.

I got up from my bed; the clock had stopped. I went out to the bathroom; the taps were not dripping and the water in the lavatory was undisturbed. In my room I saw the expressionless face in the picture and the empty field where the poppies glowed like lamps. The mirror was as dull as if its silvering had slipped to the wrong side; the walls reflected the walls opposite, with the furniture in faint shadow.

Outside the window the outline of the grounds was misted over; the trees and rock formations were obscured by the darkness; the tree-trunks and bushes lay buried in the lawns; the cliffs were levelled off.

I went out into the passage and stood on the blue carpet which swallowed up the stairs and concealed the length and perspective of the corridor. It was sealed in a stillness that was almost tangible.

I went across the corridor and opened the door of Maria's room.

She lay leaning back in the bed. Her body jutted forward and her head was pressed down in the space between the frame of the bed and the wall. Her eyes and mouth were half open and her face was covered in sweat. The bedclothes were twisted round her, threaded through her hands.

The light was switched on. I saw that the bed was empty.

I woke up when it was light.

Maria sat on a chair by my side.

She was watching something outside the window. She did not turn her head, but I followed the little movement of the pupil of her eye. I thought to myself that she was looking at the clouds.

When she saw that I was awake she told me that breakfast was over.

"Calcium tablets," I said.

She said that she on her own had dragged me into my room during the night. She had gone out on to the stairs because she was feeling physically restless. When she came back I was lying on the floor in front of the bed.

I told her about her body on the mattress. I had seen her in the anguish of death; I had been aware of the little sores on her skin, the bleeding gums, the hair falling out, all the symptoms we knew.

She did not look at me while I was speaking.

\*

The management has promised brandy after dinner to celebrate the anniversary of the hotel's foundation, she told me.

"That's better than using the alarm," I said. "Brandy is exhausting too, but that sort of intoxication is less harmful. The management has to hold the balance between the different panaceas."

"I don't think anything will happen today," she said. "Everybody is talking about the brandy."

"Do you know why the reconnaissance men have stopped sending radio reports?" I said. "While they have been staying in the stricken towns they have forgotten about the holiday guests at Termush. That is what the management is trying to disguise."

"Unless they have come to some harm," she said, "and it's that which the management is trying to hide."

I got up from my bed to put on my clothes. Before she went she touched my arm saying, "Many of the sick are dead already."



The doctor said that they are burying one or two of them each night."

\*

Brandy was served in the lounge after dinner.

A wavering excitement spread among the small tables; people began to play cards or tell stories that made those standing near them shake with laughter. The empty bottles were replaced by new ones. The laughter became louder and the pile of used glasses grew higher. Slowly the guests began to leave the lounge; they withdrew noisily into the hall and up the stairs to their rooms to sleep.

I saw later that the management helped the servants to tidy up the lounge. They examined the damage caused by cigar burns on the furniture and smashed glass on the carpet.

The groaning of the sick people in the library has died down, as if they too were issued with brandy or had been asked not to disturb the festivities on the hotel's anniversary.

## 21

A single incident has given rise to both heated and cold-blooded reactions among the guests.

The disappearance of the reconnaissance men, the isolation of some of the residents, the arrival of the sick people—all these facts admitted of more than one interpretation. The picture quickly faded; the course of events was not clearly marked and one's grasp of the situation slackened. But this story was simple. A straightforward moral was drawn from it and everyone was able to proceed with a rapid violence which showed no consideration for the victim but may have relieved the feelings of his judges.

Early this morning one of the male guests was taken down to the sick bay. He had been found in the bathroom being violently sick, having a sort of convulsion.

The doctor diagnosed radiation sickness, but before the alarm was raised the man himself explained his medical history. He was suffering from advanced cancer of the stomach. During his entire stay in Termush he had been taking pain-killing injections, but he had still had the strength and the will-power to be part of the company.

Everybody can remember that he ate only easily digestible dishes and that his excuse was an ordinary chill on the stomach. Everyone can remember that his emaciated face was a constant source of speculation.

The first vague impulse towards curiosity died. The inquisitive thoughts were replaced by a wholesale condemnation. A feeling of communal unity, never known before, sprang up among the residents at Termush. No one needed to be a chairman to gauge the opinions of other people. The feelings of the silent guests in our hotel hit me like an ice-cold ray.

The man's crime consisted in allowing himself to be registered for Termush, even though he knew he was going to die. The management had refused a number of applicants. He had given false information in answer to one of the questions on the enrolment form. The condemnation was clear, even though it was not stated in so many words.

\*

It was possible to talk a verbal shorthand. People stood still, face to face, and exchanged views. There was no need to call a meeting in the lounge; communication was going on in the rooms, between one corridor and another and on the stairs. Termush had become a living town, with streets and alleyways and a stake set up in the market-place. The residents formed a united people; no one was going to intervene and destroy its moral code. This unity abolished the painful distance between individuals; hatred and repudiation gave them the strength they needed.

I met the doctor, but could get no answer from him. He leaned against the lintel of the door and shied away from questions.

"I don't understand what has happened," he said. "The management thinks that all human reactions come under my department. But I can't hand out tranquillizers at the dinner-table."

"The anniversary is over," I said, "and the boat trip was not a success. So I would suggest using the alarm."

The doctor looked at me quickly.

"It may be possible to protect the sick man," I said.

"He has not many days left," he replied. "He is already very weak."

He turned round and went into the sick bay and I went up the stairs to Maria's room.

The boundaries of Termush have become more restricted. Nothing has happened, but the new unity and condemnation act like a protective shelter, built deeper down than the original one,

with walls of lead and doors that can be bolted against all strangers.

By breakfast-time the news came through that the sick man was dead.

Those who were sitting nearest passed this on quickly like a greeting or an abbreviated code word. There was neither triumph nor vindictiveness in their tone, neither regret nor surprise. They told it calmly as if it were an accepted point in a story.

I saw several guests stop short at the table; one of those sitting there bowed his head towards the speaker, listened and waited for a moment before spreading out his napkin.

Maria had come down before I did; she sat a little way away and did not raise her head when I came in. She did not follow the news about the man's death with her eyes. She ate very slowly.

I found the white of the egg indigestible. I swallowed my calcium tablets and drank half my tea. It seemed to me that the guests were purposely staying longer in the dining-room this morning. They sat hunched up in their places talking quietly, as if after a long period of insecurity they had found peace. They had been justified by events. Outside the sun shone and no wind stirred the branches of the trees.

I was walking alone in the garden after lunch when the alarm went off.

I had gone down among the stone statues immediately after the sun had disappeared from that low-lying place. From the gravel path I could follow the guests in the grounds, whether they walked towards the observation platform or came near the edge of the broad lawns. I saw them pass by, two by two or several together; I could not see them stepping on the flagstones, just the upper part of their bodies moving from left to right, turning to

each other and making gestures with their arms, their mouths open, talking things over.

I could not hear exactly what they said, but the hotel had become filled with energy and gaiety and the gardens were full of people strolling about together.

There had been no need to call the guests down to the shelters. They were not rebellious or irritable; behind their new-found energy lay a cruelty so indirect that they themselves were not aware of it. They had already forgotten the dead man and simply took note that the game was over. Their malice was gentle, their cruelty tired and fortuitous.

But the management was disturbed by the guests' new, unplanned activity.

I saw four figures above me at the moment when the alarm went off. They all stopped still and looked up at the sky, whose light illuminated them while I stayed in shadow. But the sky was set fair and filled with light; there was no sign of rain or depression. They looked at each other, turned round and moved slowly down on to the grass leading up to Termush.

Behind me the sun glittered on the sea. There was no movement of waves towards the shore. I rested my hand on the great leg muscle of the stone lion. It was still warm from the sun.

Then I went up the steps and across the lawn towards the house, slowly like the other guests. No one was in a hurry; everyone was ready to draw back and let someone else go first through the door into the hall.

\*

The sick had already been taken down to the shelters.

We had to go in single file along the passage to get past the big screens that had been put up in front of the beds. One of the patients was groaning, though I could tell from his voice that he was under morphia. He mumbled the same syllables over and over again without stopping and I could not make them into a word.

When we had locked the door to the shelter we were no longer disturbed by the sick people.

I saw that none of the guests expected our stay in the shelters to be long. They sat back, relaxed, looked at the ceiling or the details of the benches or started to play cards. There were no signs of uneasiness or exhaustion. Being there did not alter their expressions or their attitude to each other. Not even the shelters could take away the guests' new solidarity, their feeling of belonging to a community.

As if the management realized this, or perhaps because they had been acting at odds with their own convictions, the all-clear was sounded after an hour.

The games of cards stopped and the place emptied; the guests went straight up to their rooms to change for dinner.

Out of consideration for us the screens were not removed and the patients were not taken up to the hotel until we had all left the shelters.

I am writing down the dream I had last night.

I was looking out over the sea, which lay bathed in a faint, chilly light. I was present, but had no shape, like a sun shining but without substance.

The water was clear and translucent. Even though it was deep I saw the rock formations on the bottom, the sharp boulders bare of seaweed, all stripped and rounded as if they had been carved in marble or granite.

Through that sea swam a shoal of large fish. They did not appear to be dolphins or sharks; they were fish of a kind I did not recognize.

The shoal dived down towards the rocks, rose up as if moved by a common impulse, broke the surface with their shining backs and let their big fins glide through the air while their bodies stayed in the water. The distance between the ten or twelve fish remained the same, even though they changed places the whole time, gliding adroitly in formation. Whether they were deep down or high up in the water their bodies worked as smoothly and powerfully as if they were made of one single muscle.

Suddenly the movement of the fishes stopped; the light paled and diffused over the surface of the water; the glitter and the shadows disappeared.

At that same moment I was present in my own person; I was wearing a jacket I had in the hotel and standing on the floor of an enormous room.

When I looked up I saw the fishes hanging above me in chains, and iron pillars that stretched down from the roof. They had kept the same formation as in the water a moment before. Above them lay the sky, like a great blue-painted monochrome plate.



When I had grown used to the half-light in the room I saw the big open sores in the bellies of the fish.

\*

Immediately after dinner, while we were sitting in the lounge and the last light was fading in the garden, a woman came running or half stumbling in through the door from the hall.

One of the male guests sprang up and caught hold of her to save her from falling on to the table, where there were cups waiting to be filled.

"The lavatory, the lavatory," she said, unable to explain herself.

There were three or four of us who went out to the small lavatory under the stairs in the hall.

The door was half open and the light was not switched on. But in the light of the hall lamp we could see a man who had hanged himself. He had placed the rope round the wide pipe from the cistern and let himself down from the lavatory seat. He had landed with his legs apart and one of his trouser legs was darkly stained with urine.

When we had cut him down the doctor was called. The hall was cordoned off until the body had been taken away and the little cloakroom had been cleaned up.

We all went back to the dining-room where the coffee was cold and tasted bitter on the tongue.

A few of the guests, those who lived nearest to the dead man, were summoned by the management. I could not make out why the management should be interested in half-explanations and bits of gossip. No one could contribute an explanation of the man's death. Had it happened because he was a guest at Termush or was it the result of some inner decision? Was it at all possible to differentiate between the two?

The evening was spent in this meaningless investigation. But it seemed that the guests gradually became reassured. The suicide case seemed easy to grasp while we treated it methodically; the

disturbing questions disappeared and we waited only for the answer and the explanation.

\*

I went with Maria outside the house. It was the first time we had been in the garden after dark.

It was hard to follow the path in the faint light of the moon.

She walked close behind me, warm and agitated by what had happened.

The earth, now cool, smelt soft among the trees. From the sea an almost visible wind blew into the garden.

In the main building of the hotel lights shone on the ground floor. Higher up individual rooms were lit up. None of the windows needed curtains; Termush had no neighbours; neither now or in the past had there been any need to fear embarrassment. The hotel's estate was large and the countryside beyond was rocky and sparsely inhabited. No one wanted to settle down or let cattle graze in the country round about Termush.

I walked with Maria in the garden in the dark as if we were part of an old painting. Even my invitation to take a walk in the evening seemed like an old-fashioned cliché. My way of leading her by the arm, my manner of speech when I talk to her are obsolete, as are my thoughts when I want to make a comprehensive criticism of Termush. I look around me and come to the same conclusions that visitors to Termush have always done. Even when I try to express my perceptions I use the same language and start from the same fixed premises.

I felt suddenly chilled and asked Maria to go back. It was easier to follow the path as we returned, the light from the hall and the lounge picked it out. I saw myself as an aged landowner who sees his house on fire and his servants struck down. The rebels are already on the stairs and against them he has only his whip and his quotation from Corneille.

I held Maria's arm when we suddenly heard three pistol shots.

They came from the edge of the grounds, inland, near the place where the drive disappears behind a rocky promontory.

We stopped still at the same moment.

"It's the security men who are shooting," she said.

I nodded but said nothing and we went inside.

Since a few of the guests who were standing in the hall showed no reaction, I judged that the noise of the pistol shots had not penetrated the hotel.

It was quite impossible to rest during the night. Periods of lively wakefulness alternated with a dark, exhausting stupor.

Morning found me sitting on my bed, my skin tense and fever in my blood. In the dark I reversed the order of the room when I wanted to open the window. I put my fingers on the hinges of the door without recognizing what they were. I did not want to give way to panic, and I convinced myself that I had let my hands slip under the window-frame. I felt the wall again and waited to touch the cold glass or the curtains. Suddenly the table hit me hard on the hip.

When I put out my hand a second later I found the light switch.

Shaken, I decided to get dressed. I wanted to go out in the garden and watch the security men's manoeuvres.

I stopped at the door of the hall leading into the chilly garden to find the key that fitted the lock. While I had hold of the heavy door a hand was laid on my shoulder.

"I must ask you to go up to your room," said the security man.

I stepped back from the door, which swung closed.

"No one can prevent my being in the hall," I said.

"I only have orders to forbid you to go into the garden," he said.

"Me?" I said.

"Anyone who goes near the main door," he said.

"Ah, you're thinking about the shooting," I said.

He raised his hand as if he wanted to reply. Then he turned round rapidly and left.

At the breakfast table a rumour spread without causing the usual excitement. No one had sufficient concentration to take it seriously, though only a few days before it would have aroused noisy comment.

Two male guests had forced their way into the room occupied by the girl who had put the bowl of fruit in the washroom. They had lain down on her bed, but she screamed and pushed one of them against a radiator, hurting him in the process. The management had put the two men on trial, but they had been drunk on spirits or nerve tonic and had defended themselves by saying that earlier the girl had invited one of the security men into her room. The management gave them a caution and promised to keep their names secret. The doctor gave the girl a tranquillizing injection and for the time being she was excused from her duties.

The story spread from table to table and was greeted with smiles or shaking of the head. The former curiosity had gone and the common indignation had faded away.

I see Termush as a large organism, a single body, which acts according to different laws from those which apply to each individual guest. No one can foresee a reaction; the organism comes up with its reply later on, positive or negative. Or it reacts unexpectedly, as in paralysis—it rests and is tolerant and then kicks out like a damaged muscle.

But I must ask myself whether I am not colouring what I see with my own views. Whether in my zeal and anxiety I make the general reaction distorted and fearful. Whether I too am to blame for the fact that Termush is shut in on itself, because I think I am making a significant contribution by talking to the doctor or running out into the garden to listen for pistol shots. My criticisms are turned inwards towards myself; my own desire for written notes tells me that I want to formulate my questions and doubts but that I have already given up hope of answering them.

The twelve guests who had been in isolation were let out of the shelters in the afternoon. The doctor had recommended a longer period of quarantine but psychological reactions were weighed against physical ones.

Five days in the shelters had changed the twelve in confinement to pale, frightened figures. We remind them of their quarantine every moment with our suntanned faces and easy movements of arms and legs.

The twelve guests sit together in the lounge or walk together in the gardens, as if after their exile they were condemned to keep together. Disaster has already left its mark on them in our eyes; somewhere in their bodies lies the germ of change, of mutilation and decay. And somewhere within the healthy people lies a far-reaching contempt for the deformed.

One picture in our minds gives us constant anxiety; we see the day when the fish leave the water and push through the sand and earth to the trees, where they bite into the bark with their skinless jaws and drag themselves up into the branches to live according to new instincts. We see the trees bare of leaves, festooned with fishy skeletons, their skins rustling like a death-rattle.

We see the turtle lay eggs and burrow into the earth, where it dies of thirst; birds fall out of their nests without using their wings; the foal licks stones while the mare's udder is bursting with milk; the goat flays its kid and tries to chew its flesh; the bee turns its sting on itself; the corn starts to grow downwards and the roots of the trees rise up to search for water from the air.

And we see a market square or a great room full of human beings, lying or crawling or sitting. Some of them are without hair, their faces are bloated and mad and they are unable to stand up. But among these feeble-minded ones sits the one man of genius. His head is swollen up; his gaze is steady, but his face is distorted with pain. All his strength has become concentrated in his brain and his legs are unable to support him. Only by dragging himself over the bodies of the imbeciles, as they have to drag themselves over him, can he reach the spring of fresh water that runs nearby.

Our fear is no longer a fear of death but of change and mutilation. We have not thought this through and cannot talk about it, but in those moments when we are able to escape from our own personal needs the picture becomes clear to us.

It is impossible to sustain this thought. We cut it down; we put a ring round it in order to forget it. And we single out the twelve guests as evidence of our fear which we have not the strength to bear.

Maria came up to my room while the twelve guests crept round the park.

## 25

Early in the morning a group of strangers broke into the gardens.

At the hotel everything was quiet, only at the edge of the grounds one of the watchmen was struck down. The lawns stretch from the rough, churned-up land right up to the hotel building with no obstacle of any kind; the strangers had no trouble in reaching the hall.

When they were carrying their injured into the sick bay they were met by three security men with automatic pistols.

The strangers gave up their weapons but refused to be detained.

When the doctor arrived the security men were standing there pointing aimlessly with their automatics. One of them kicked open the door and ran out into the garden where he began to shoot up into the air or among the trees. The doctor went into the sick bay to give first aid to the injured.

Many of the guests had assembled on the stairs. The tense, prolonged silence was broken by a group on the bottom landing. As if moved by a common impulse they began to shout and go down to the bottom step and across the floor of the hall towards the strangers.

They were stopped by the security men's automatic pistols. They jerked back, protesting, and their last shout rose up from the stairs. In the moment of silence we could hear the injured moaning feebly from the sick bay.

One of the management staff asked the guests to go back to their rooms.

Gradually the hall emptied of spectators. Disturbed and tired we went up the stairs to split up along the various corridors.



\*

For a moment it seemed as if all possibilities were open. No one could avoid the crisis by a straightforward rejection.

But the barriers glided together again like twin halves of a sphere. Bewilderment and doubt disappeared; everyone knew his own mind. This happened without votes or meetings, as if after a common revelation.

We cannot keep out the intruders in the morning. But preparing to meet them has become the final duty of our defence; the security men have been held in readiness for twenty-four hours around the walls of the garden and the building. They have orders to shoot at anyone who crosses the boundary of the estate.

I cannot analyse the new strength, which among the guests takes the form of energy and excitement. Explanations float past me as if I were sunk deep in water.

In the lounge the management gave full particulars of the system of guard duty. They familiarized the guests with every explicit detail. Everything in Termush has begun to grow inwards.

The last member of the management I have never seen before. His weariness and his long, exploratory pauses make me think that he is the voice of the hotel's loudspeaker, but perhaps I am attaching too much importance to a chance similarity.

He told us about the crowd of strangers, who are wandering about in the countryside around Termush. Stricken people from the nearest towns or the more distant cities, remnants of larger groups, most of whom have succumbed to injuries or the big epidemics. The strongest have banded together to search for medicine and food, or towns where all the inhabitants are dead and the stores are untouched. On the way many of them have heard about Termush.

No one moved when he finished speaking.

The management itself broke the stillness by calling him down and giving orders for the doors to be opened.

Nine security men entered in their shining suits with their protective jackets and automatic pistols. They looked straight

ahead and walked remarkably lightly in their heavy boots up to the management's table. There they formed a line with the traditional movements of weapon and body, all with their faces towards us.

The management turned in their chairs and I saw that they smiled, perhaps relieved, perhaps proud.

Immediately after the end of the meeting the first party of security men started on their duties. From the dining-room and the hall and from windows in the bedrooms and corridors we could follow the movements of the white-clad figures. An inner cordon was set up by the building and an outer one on the edge of the estate. They kept to their allotted stations while the more vigilant and healthy among the guests patrolled the garden and the entrance to the drive with their eyes.

You could pick out the soldiers long after their silhouettes had been blurred by the trees and bushes.

Exhausted as I am, I know that from this moment we have barred the way back. All the paths and passages and corridors have become cul-de-sacs; there is no through road; they lead only inwards. Nothing more can happen.

In the silence I hear the faint call that the soldiers on the watch use to keep the men on the qui vive, or is it a special code for passing on reports and orders to one another?

The night was dark, crowded, punctured by sudden shots from the guards. I slept without dreaming, lay without turning over, my calf and shoulder muscles taut. Darkness filled the room in the same moment that sleep overpowered me.

I spoke to Maria and offered the management the use of my room to accommodate the injured. I could easily move in with Maria; it would be no appreciable inconvenience for me and she is willing to have me.

The management rejected my offer immediately. I was annoyed and may have said too much. Maria thought after I had told her what happened that I had said too much.

Several of the guests witnessed my argument with the management, though that was not my intention. I left the office in a state of agitation without shutting the door. I felt a powerful physical spasm.

\*

There have been shots several times today. No one knows whether they were all warning shots. The management, who mix with the guests the whole time, say that the sight of the reinforced guard has driven the strangers away.

One of the guards came in from the garden with an injured arm. The accident was blamed on his carelessness with a hand grenade. He was supported by two other men, but not only his head was bandaged, his face too was hidden when he was carried into the sick bay.

We gathered in the hall in aimless groups, impelled to come together and then separate, while the management went round

talking to us. No important incident has happened and the prevailing atmosphere is as if all the reports from the grounds had been details of a victory. Apart from the whiteclad guards the gardens have been empty, but everyone is looking expectantly in that direction.

\*

I sit at the table. Maria is lying on my bed. We are both silent.

In the hall and the lounge I felt that the other guests knew about my offer to the management. Their attitude did not suggest clearly disapproval or irritation, but I sensed their light contempt for my efforts.

I went up to my room immediately after the evening meal. From here, too, I can hear movements in the corridors and in the hall. In the grounds there was a sudden shot, but I heard no shout.

Without conscious thought I summed up the room with my eyes; the mirror, the two shining pictures, the bed, the window, the door that is closed. I let my eyes wander from object to object. Maria has fallen asleep with her face turned aside.

Two of the security men have been killed by the strangers. The morning passed calmly; the guard was changed at mid-day. Shortly afterwards our adversaries opened fire from several hidden positions in the surrounding country.

The two security men were carried into the hall. The face of one was unrecognizable; I think from his figure that it was he who warned Maria about the bird.

The dead were covered with sheets. The guests passed by the plank bed, where the outlines of the bodies could be seen through the material. Their protective clothing had already been removed to be cleansed.

We stayed in the hall or the lounge, where the management kept giving us new details. They took care to emphasize the number of dead among the strangers.

In the grounds the guards moved more rapidly, with greater energy or anger. From the window we followed them perseveringly, as if they needed our will-power in order to act freely.

After a few hours the strangers' attack ceased.

We are staying in the shelters.

There was a new attack on the guard this morning. Volunteers among the guests have begun to offer to take up the left-over weapons and protective suits.

Maria does not reply when I speak to her. She stares at me, wounded. She keeps close to me, follows me almost stride for stride, as if this were an order. She frightens me. She is sitting by my side, leaning against the wall, asleep.

There has been talk of possibilities of flight. Some talk about hostages or the burning up of the estate or the destruction of Termush above ground.

The strangers have stopped shooting. On the cliffs nearby their camp-fires are visible in the darkness. The guards who report this are quite exhausted.

We are allowed to leave the shelters, but the majority of us choose to spend the night here.

My skin burns in my hands.

We have decided to leave Termush.

The first killed and wounded among the volunteers have been brought back to the hotel.

Early in the morning a motor yacht is sailing from Termush.

They have already started bringing down the provisions and the drinking water. The transport section is camouflaged and is being covered by the guards. While this activity is going on soldiers are reinforcing our defences at the boundaries of the estate. Everywhere among the rocks and in the flat, wooded countryside our enemy can be found. The guards have marked his positions and his movements on a map.

The doctor says that he will stay at Termush. The deputy medical officer is coming in the motor yacht. The doctor's intention is to help the strangers, among whom there are certain to be many injured. Neither the management nor the guests have raised any objections to his decision.

\*

I feel as if all the time I were waiting for Maria. She follows me everywhere, stops a little way behind me and gazes at me until I move on. She is remote and watchful; I look at her to see in what way she has changed.

I see her eyes, which are clear and open. She understands what I say to her, but she does not answer. Even when I meet her gaze it feels as if she had mentally turned her back on anyone who looks at her.

I take her hand and feel her skin; I hold her close to me and she smiles. But it has no effect on her. So I go on walking and she

follows calmly behind me, and if the other guests speak to her she does not look at them.

When she is cold she stops me and points to my jacket.



In the morning, when it was light, the enemy attacked. The guard was reinforced at the farthest boundaries of the estate but a smaller group thrust in up the drive. There was a moment's confusion while conflicting orders were given to our soldiers. The attack was beaten off.

The alarm on the hotel roof called us out of our rooms. With no time to bring anything with us but our most essential possessions, we moved in small groups through the gardens to the motor yacht. The guards protected us. Apart from some superficial wounds from the shooting the hotel guests came aboard unscathed. The guards withdrew through the gardens; it happened so suddenly that the enemy did not understand their intention. Our soldiers reached the boat before the strangers broke in through the perimeter of the grounds.

As we sailed away we saw that the gardens were full of people. We lay close together on the floor and the benches to protect ourselves against gunfire from the park. But no shots were fired after us. Halfway down the slope the great stone figures gleamed in the sun.

\*

All is quiet in the ship's lounge. The land has disappeared. The sun is strong and warm. Everywhere heads drop down; bodies are too tired to support them. Maria rests against me.

# 31

No one wakes up refreshed. Coffee and rolls are brought round.

The heat is powerful, although we froze during the night. They are having trouble with the engine.

We move to go up on deck or out to the lavatory.

The boat rolls gently. There is no wind.

We are half lying in our seats, many with eyes half closed against the sun. No one moves about more than is necessary.

Outside the sea is still; there is no darkness and no light.

## About the Authors

SVEN HOLM (1940–2019) was a celebrated Danish author and playwright. He made his debut as a twenty-one-year-old with an acclaimed story collection in 1961, followed by other works including his post-apocalyptic dystopian novel *Termush* (1967), which was translated into English by Sylvia Clayton and published by Faber in 1969. In 1974, Holm was awarded the Grand Prize of the Danish Academy, where he was made a member in 2001, the same year he won the Danish Critics Prize for Literature. He was awarded the Holberg Medal in 1991.

JEFF VANDERMEER's *New York Times*-bestselling Southern Reach Trilogy has been translated into over thirty-five languages. The first novel, *Annihilation*, won the Nebula Award and Shirley Jackson Award and was made into a movie by Paramount in 2018. His other works include *Dead Astronauts*, *Borne* (a finalist for the Arthur C. Clarke Award), *The Strange Bird* and *Hummingbird Salamander*. Called the 'weird Thoreau' by the *New Yorker*, VanderMeer frequently writes and speaks about climate change, the environment and storytelling. He is president of the Sunshine State Biodiversity Group, a non-profit devoted to rewilding, biodiversity education and environmental journalism. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with his wife Ann, cat Neo and a yard full of native plants.

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Mrs Caliban  
Palace of the Peacock  
They  
Maud Martha  
The Glass Pearls  
A Wreath for Udomo  
The Shutter of Snow

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First published in Danish as *Termush, Atlanterhavskysten*  
in 1967 by Gyldendal

First published in English as *Termush*  
in Sylvia Clayton's translation in 1969  
by Faber & Faber Limited  
The Bindery  
51 Hatton Garden  
London EC1N 8HN

This ebook edition first published in the UK in 2023

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Published by agreement with Gyldendal Group Agency

Translation © Sylvia Clayton, 1969

Foreword © Jeff VanderMeer, 2023

Cover design by Faber

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*Note to reader:* *Termush* was first published in 1967. The language in these  
pages is a reflection of the historical period in which the book was originally  
written.

ISBN 978-0-571-37916-3

**Mrs Caliban*****by Rachel Ingalls****With a new foreword by Irenosen Okojie*

Dorothy is a grieving housewife in the Californian suburbs. One day, she is doing chores when she hears strange voices on the radio announcing that a green-skinned sea monster has escaped from the Institute for Oceanographic Research – but little does she expect him to arrive in her kitchen. Vegetarian, sexually magnetic and excellent at housework, Larry the frogman is a revelation – and their passionate affair takes them on a journey beyond their wildest dreams ...

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'Creepily prescient ... Insidiously horrifying.' Margaret Atwood

'A masterpiece of creeping dread.' Emily St. John Mandel

'The signature of an enchantress.' Edna O'Brien

'Delicious and sexy and downright chilling. Read it!' Rumaan Alam

'A masterwork of English pastoral horror: eerie and bewitching.'  
Claire-Louise Bennett

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## **The Shutter of Snow**

***by Emily Holmes Coleman***

*With a new foreword by Claire-Louise Bennett*

Some days, Marthe Gail believes she is God; others, Jesus Christ. Her baby, she thinks, is dead. The red light is shining. There are bars on the window. And the voices keep talking. Time blurs; snow falls. The doctors say it is a breakdown; that this is Gorestown State Hospital. Her husband visits and shows her a lock of her baby's hair, but she doesn't remember, yet ...

'In this extraordinary novel, Coleman rebelliously shows how women might write if we were free.' Lucy Ellmann

'Haunting and evocative, this is a timeless portrayal of madness.' Catherine Cho

'Startling, luminous and magnetic.' Yiyun Li

'With its deep musicality, Coleman's unique voice was years ahead of its time.' Sinéad Gleeson



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## **The Glass Pearls**

***by Emeric Pressburger***

*With a new foreword by Anthony Quinn*

London, June 1965. Karl Braun arrives as a lodger in Pimlico: hatless, with a bow tie, greying hair, slight in build. His new neighbours are intrigued by this German piano tuner; many are fellow émigrés, who assume that he, like them, came to England to flee Hitler. That summer, Braun courts a woman, attends classical concerts, dances the twist. But as the newspapers fill with reports of the hunt for Nazi war criminals, his nightmares worsen ...

'A tremendous rediscovery ... A wonderfully compelling noir thriller.'  
William Boyd

'This extraordinary novel had me hooked from start to finish.'  
Sarah Waters

'A remarkable novel, as startlingly original as any of Pressburger's films.'  
Nicola Upson

'Stunning: incredibly good, thought-provoking and tense.'  
Ian Rankin

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## **Palace of the Peacock**

***by Wilson Harris***

*With a new foreword by Jamaica Kincaid*

A crew of men are voyaging up a turbulent river through the rainforests of Guyana, led by a domineering captain. But their expedition is plagued by tragedies and haunted by drowned ghosts. As their journey into the interior – their own hearts of darkness – deepens, it assumes a spiritual dimension, leading them towards a new destination: the Palace of the Peacock ...

'A magnificent, breathtaking and terrifying novel.' Tsitsi Dangarembga

'The Guyanese William Blake.' Angela Carter

'A masterpiece.' Monique Roffey

'One of the great originals ... Visionary.' *Guardian*

'Staggering ... Brilliant and terrifying.' *The Times*

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## **A Wreath for Udomo**

***by Peter Abrahams***

*With a new foreword by Petina Gappah*

A 1950s London pub; a freezing night. Lois can't tear her eyes away from a haunted African man, and soon discovers that he is in awe of her friend, Panafrika's greatest political writer and fighter. Their meeting inducts this stranger into London's revolutionary community of exiled African activists. Amidst the politics and love affairs, he is inspired by other leaders' independence uprisings – but when he returns home to overthrow colonial oppressors, his dreams are put to the ultimate test ...

'The forerunner of an entire school of African literary art.' *Sunday Times*

'A writer of the world ... We followed the trail he bravely blazed.'  
Nadine Gordimer

'Explores with sensitivity and passion the complexities of racial politics ... An important literary voice.' *New York Times*